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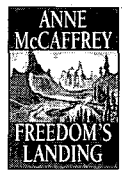

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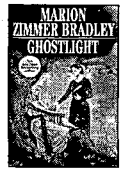

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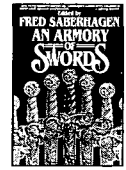

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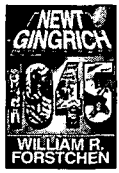

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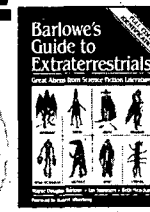

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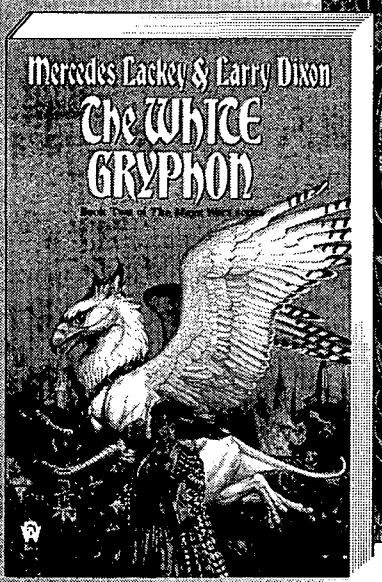

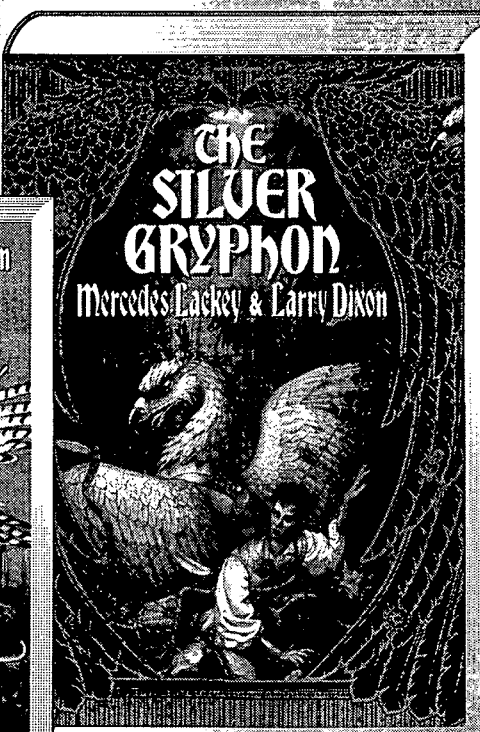

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EDITORIAL

KRISTINE KATHRYN RUSCH

WRITERS have always influenced other writers. Sometimes they do directly, by reading and commenting on each other's work; and sometimes they do so indirectly, by stating a proposition, explicating an idea, or creating a situation so powerful other writers have had to comment on it.

Ever since the turn of the century, writers who work in the field of science fiction (or *scientifiction*, as Hugo Gernsback first called it) have built on the works of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells. Wells gave us our first time machine, and Verne in his rip-roaring adventures somehow managed to be so scientifically prescient that science fiction writers today are *still* expected to predict the future as well as he did.

Some of the things these men wrote about, such as Verne's wonderful undersea vessel, the *Nautilus*, became fact. Some things, like Wells' time machine, don't exist yet. Other things moved from the realm of scientific possibility to impossibility. A case in point is H.G. Wells' Martians.

When H.G. Wells published *War of the Worlds* in 1898, Mars was a distant place, visible through telescopes. And Mars had what appeared to be canals. For generations, these "canals" spurred speculation that creatures had made them, and creatures that could make canals had civilizations, and could build rocket ships. Wells' Martians flew to Earth on rockets and landed in Europe. Only Wells' Martians were not interested in scientific commerce. They, like good 19th century imperialists, were interested in conquest.

Wells used his short novel to show England, then the largest Empire in the Western world, what it felt like to be a conquered country. But he did follow the dictates of his day in one area. Romantic Fiction of the type he wrote had happy endings. And the Martians did die, conquered not by human ingenuity, but by those tiny little warriors, germs.

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Over the decades, *War of the Worlds* inspired a number of wonderful science fiction stories. Some, like Howard Waldrop's "Night of the Cooters" in which the Martians land in Texas, take their cues directly from Wells. Others, like Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*, build an entirely different world and an entirely different story on the foundations Wells laid.

In the years since 1898, we have discovered that Mars does not have canals (contrary to Dan Quayle's beliefs), and that the planet probably never supported life as we know it. Stories about Martians are no longer science fiction, but fantasy of a particularly nostalgic type. We are curiously reluctant to let go of our Martians, whether they be the horrible long legged conquerors from outer space, or the ethereal frightening beauties suggested by Bradbury. Wells, almost a century later, is still influencing science fiction writers.

In this issue, we have three stories about Wells' Martians. Mike Resnick shows us how Teddy Roosevelt would have reacted if he had met one; David Brin and Gregory Benford introduce Jules Verne to Wells' Martians; and Dave Wolverton, writing in the style of Jack London, gives us Martians in the Alaskan wilderness. All three are strong stories and one, I believe, might even become a classic.

The fact that four writers have tackled the same subject is no accident. About five years ago, best-selling writer Kevin J. Anderson realized that the hundredth anniversary of *War of the Worlds* was fast approaching. He proposed an anthology, a tribute to Wells, and asked some of his favorite writers to participate in it. Usually when a writer proposes an anthology, a handful of the invited writers agree to participate. In this case, *all* of the invited writers did. Science fiction writers have a great fondness for Wells.

Bantam Books will publish the anthology, titled *War of the Worlds: Global Dispatches*, edited by Kevin J. Anderson, in June of 1996. We hope you enjoy this sample, and rush out to see which of your favorite authors brought Wells' Martians to a select corner of the world.

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When Bruce Sterling called me last year to say he could no longer do a science column on a regular basis, I begged him to continue. I pleaded with him. (Remember, we mentioned the art of editorial begging in a previous issue.) When it became clear that I could not change his mind, I asked that he send us an occasional short story.

"The Littlest Jackal" is not an occasional short story. It is a strong novella, bringing Bruce's continuing character, Leggy Starlitz, back to our pages.

The Littlest Jackal

By Bruce Sterling

"I HATE SIBELIUS," SAID THE Russian mafioso.

"It's that Finnish nationalist thing," said Leggy Starlitz.

"That's *why* I hate Sibelius." The Russian's name was Pulat R. Khoklov. He'd once been a KGB liaison officer to the air force of the Afghan government. Like many Afghan War veterans, Khoklov had gone into organized crime since the Soviet crackup.

Starlitz examined the Sibelius CD's print-job and plastic hinges with a dealer's professional eye. "Europeans sure pretend to like this classic stuff," he said. "Almost like pop, but it can't move real product." He placed the CD back in the rack. The outdoor market table was nicely set with cunningly targeted tourist-bait. Starlitz glanced over the glass earrings and the wooden jewelry, then closely examined a set of lewd postcards.

"This isn't 'Europe,'" Khoklov sniffed. "This is a Czarist Grand Duchy with bourgeois pretensions."

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Starlitz fingered a poly-cotton souvenir jersey with comical red-nosed reindeer. It bore an elaborate legend in the Finno-Ugric tongue, a language infested with umlauts. "This is Finland, ace: It's European Union."

Khoklov was kitted-out to the nines in a three-piece linen suit and a snappy straw boater. Life in the New Russia had been very good to Khoklov. "At least Finland's not NATO."

"Look, fuckin' Poland is NATO now. Get over it."

They moved on to another table, manned by a comely Finn in a flowered summer frock and jelly shoes. Starlitz tried on a pair of shades from a revolving stand. He gazed experimentally about the marketplace. Potatoes. Dill. Carrots and onions. Buckets of strawberries. Flowers and flags. Orange fabric canopies over wooden market tables run by Turks and gypsies. People were selling salmon straight from the decks of funky little fishing boats.

Khoklov sighed. "Lekhi, you have no historical perspective." He plucked a Dunhill from a square red pack.

One of Khoklov's two bodyguards appeared at once, alertly flicking a Zippo. "No proper sense of *culture,*" insisted Khoklov, breathing smoke and coughing richly. The guard tucked the lighter into his Chicago Bulls jacket and padded off silently on his spotless Adidas.

Starlitz, who was trying to quit, bummed a smoke from Khoklov, which he was forced to light for himself. Then he paid for the shades, peeling a salmon-colored fifty from a dense wad of Finnish marks.

Khoklov paused nostalgically by the Czarina's Obelisk, a bellicose monument festooned with Romanov aristo-fetish gear in cast bronze. Khoklov, whose politics shaded toward Pamyat rightism with a mystical pan-Slavic spin, patted the granite base of the Obelisk with open pleasure.

Then he gazed across the Esplanadi. "Helsinki city hall?"

Starlitz adjusted his shades. When arranging his end of the deal from a cellar in Tokyo, he hadn't quite gathered that Finland would be so relentlessly bright. "That's the city hall all right."

Khoklov turned to examine the sun-spattered Baltic. "Think you could hit that building from a passing boat?"

"You mean me personally? Forget it."

"I mean someone in a hired speedboat with a shoulder-launched surplus Red Army panzerfaust. Generically speaking."

"Anything's possible nowadays."

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"At night," urged Khoklov. "A pre-dawn urban commando raid! Cleverly planned. Precisely executed. Ruthless operational accuracy!"

"This is summer in Finland," said Starlitz. "The sun's not gonna set here for a couple of months."

Khoklov, tripped up in the midst of his reverie, frowned. "No matter. You weren't the agent I had in mind in any case."

They wandered on. A Finn at a nearby table was selling big swollen muskrat-fur hats. No sane local would buy these items, for they were the exact sort of pseudo-authentic cultural relics that appeared only in tourist economies. The Finn, however, was flourishing. He was deftly slotting and whipping the Mastercards and Visas of sunburnt Danes and Germans through a handheld cellular credit checker.

"Our man arrives tomorrow morning on the Copenhagen ferry," Khoklov announced.

"You ever met this character before?" Starlitz said. "Ever done any real business with him?"

Khoklov sidled along, flicking the smoldering butt of his Dunhill onto the gray stone cobbles. "I've never met him myself. My boss knew him in the seventiess. My boss used to run him from the KGB HQ in East Berlin. They called him Raf, back then. Raf the Jackal."

Starlitz scratched his close-cropped, pumpkin-like head. "I've heard of *Carlos* the Jackal."

"No, no," Khoklov said, pained. "Carlos retired, he's in Khartoum. This is Raf. A different man entirely."

"Where's he from?"

"Argentina. Or Italy. He once ran arms between the Tupamaros and the Red Brigades. We think he was an Italian Argentine originally."

"KGB recruited him and you didn't even know his nationality?"

Khoklov frowned. "We never recruited him! KGB never had to recruit any of those Seventies people! Baader-Meinhoff, Palestinians.... They always came straight to us!" He sighed wistfully. "American Weather Underground — how I wanted to meet a groovy hippie revolutionary from Weather Underground! But even when they were blowing up the Bank of America the Yankees would never talk to real communists."

"The old boy must be getting on in years."

"No no. He's very much alive, and very charming. The truly dangerous

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are always very charming. It's how they survive."

"I like surviving," Starlitz said thoughtfully.

"Then you can learn a few much-needed lessons in charm, Lekhi. Since you're our liaison."

Raf the Jackal arrived from across the Baltic in a sealed Fiat. It was a yellow two-door with Danish plates. His driver was a Finnish girl, maybe twenty. Her dyed-black hair was braided with long green extensions of tattered yarn. She wore a red blouse, cut-off jeans and striped cotton stockings.

Starlitz climbed into the passenger seat, slammed the door, and smiled. The girl was sweating with heat, fear, and nervous tension. She had a battery of ear-piercings. A tattooed wolf's-head was stenciled up her clavicle and nosing at the base of her neck.

Starlitz twisted and looked behind him. The urban guerrilla was scrunched into the Fiat's back seat, asleep, doped, or dead. Raf wore a denim jacket, relaxed-fit Levis and Ray-Bans. He'd taken his sneakers off and was sleeping in his rumpled mustard-yellow socks.

"How's the old man?" Starlitz said, adjusting his seat belt.

"Ferries make him seasick." The girl headed up the Esplanade. "We'll wake him at the safe-house." She shot him a quick sideways glance of kohl-lined eyes. "You found a good safe-house?"

"Sure, the place should do," said Starlitz. He was pleased that her English was so good. After four years tending bar in Roppongi, the prospect of switching Japanese for Finnish was dreadful. "What do they call you?"

"What did they tell you to call me?"

"Got no instructions on that."

The girl's pale knuckles whitened on the Fiat's steering-wheel. "They didn't inform you of my role in this operation?"

"Why would they wanna do that?"

"Raf is our agent now," the girl said. "He's not your agent. Our operations coincide — but only because our interests coincide. Raf belongs to my movement. He doesn't belong to any kind of Russians."

Starlitz twisted in his seat to stare at the slumbering terrorist. He envied the guy's deep sense of peace. It was hard to tell through the Ray-Bans, but the smear of sweat on his balding forehead gave Raf a look of unfeigned ease.

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Starlitz pondered the girl's latest remark. He had no idea why a college-age female Finn would claim to be commanding a 51-year-old veteran urban guerrilla.

"Why do you say that?" he said at last. This was usually a safe and useful question.

The girl glanced in the rear-view. They were passing a sunstruck green park, with bronze statues of swaggering Finnish poets and mood-stricken Finnish dramatists. She took a corner with a squeak of tires. "Since you need a name, call me Aino."

"Okay. I'm Leggy.... Or Lekhi.... Or Reggae." He'd been getting a lot of "Reggae" lately. "The safe-house is in Ypsallina. You know that neighborhood?" Starlitz plucked a laminated tourist map from his shirt pocket. "Take Mannerheimintie up past the railway station."

"You're not Russian," Aino concluded.

"Nyet."

"Are you Organizatsiya?"

"I forget what you have to do to officially join the Russian mafia, but basically, no."

"Why are you involved in the Ålands operation? You don't look political."

Leggy found the lever beneath the passenger seat and leaned back a little, careful not to jostle the slumbering terrorist. "You're sure you want to hear about that?"

"Of course I want to hear. Since we are working together."

"Okay. Have it your way. It's like this," Starlitz said. "I've been in Tokyo working for an all-girl Japanese metal band. These girls made it pretty big and they bought this disco downtown in Roppongi. I was managing the place.... Besides the headbanging, these metal-chicks ran another racket on the side. Memorabilia. A target-market teenage-kid thing. Fanmags, keychains, T-shirts, CD-ROMs.... Lotta money there!"

Aino stopped at a traffic light. The cobbled crosswalk filled with a pedestrian mass of sweating, sun-dazed Finns.

"Anyway, after I developed that teen market, I found this other thing. These cute little animals. 'Froofies.' Major hit in Japan. Froofy velcro shoes, Froofy candy, sodas, backpacks, badges, lunchkits... Froofies are what they call 'kawai.'"

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Aino drove on. They passed a bronze Finnish general on horseback. He had been a defeated general, but he looked like defeating him again would be far more trouble than it was worth. "What's kawai?"

Starlitz rubbed his stubbled chin. "'Cute' doesn't get it across. Maybe 'adorable.' Big-money-making adorable. The kicker is that Froofies come from Finland."

"I'm a Finn. I don't know anything called Froofies."

"They're kids' books. This little old Finnish lady wrote them. On her kitchen table. Illustrated kid-stories from the Forties and Fifties. Of course lately they've been made into manga and anime and Nintendo cassettes and a whole bunch of other stuff...."

Aino's brows rose. "Do you mean Flüüvins? Little blue animals with heads like big fat pillows?"

"Oh, you know them, then."

"My *mother* read me Flüüvins! Why would Japanese want Flüüvins?"

"Well, the scam was — this old lady, she lives on this secluded island. Middle of the Baltic. Complete ass-end of nowhere. Old girl never married. No manager. No agent. Obviously not getting a dime off all this major Japanese action. Probably senile. So the plan is — I fly over to Finland. To these islands. Hunt her down. Cut a deal with her. Get her signature. Then, we sue."

"I don't understand you."

"She lives in the Åland Islands. Those islands are crucial to your people, and the Organizatsiya too. So you see the general convergence of interests here?"

Aino shook her green-braided head. "We have serious political and economic interests in the Ålands. Flüüvins are silly books for children."

"What's 'serious?' I'm talking plastic action figures! Cartoon drinking glasses. Kid-show theme songs. When a thing like this hits, it's major revenue. Factories churning round the clock in Shenzhen. Crates full of stuff into mall anchor-stores. Did you know that the 'California Raisins' are worth more than the entire California raisin crop? That's a true fact!"

Aino was growing gloomy. "I hate raisins. Californians use slave ethnic labor and pesticides. Raisins are nasty little dead grapes."

"I'm copacetic, but we're talking Japan here," Starlitz insisted. "Higher per-capita than Marin County! The ruble's in the toilet now, but the yen is

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sky-high. We get a big shakedown settlement in yen, we launder it in rubles, and we clear major revenue completely off the books. That's serious as cancer."

Aino lowered her voice. "I don't believe you. Why are you telling me such terrible lies? That's a very stupid cover story for an international spy!"

"You had to ask." Starlitz shrugged.

THEY FOUND THE SAFEHOUSE in Ypsallina. It was a duplex. The other half of the duplex was occupied by a gullible Finnish yuppie couple with workaholic schedules. Starlitz produced the keys. Aino went in, checked every room and every window with paranoid care, then went back to the Fiat and woke Raf.

Raf wobbled into the apartment, found the bathroom. He vomited with gusto, then turned on the shower. Aino brought in a pair of bulging blue nylon sports bags. There was no phone service, but Khoklov's people had thoughtfully left a clone-chipped cellular on the bedroom dresser.

Starlitz, who had been in the safehouse before, retrieved his laptop from the kitchen closet. It was Japanese portable with a keyboard the length of a cricket bat, a complex mess of ASCII, kanji, katakana, hiragana and arcane function keys. It had a cellular modem.

Starlitz logged in to a Helsinki Internet service provider and checked the metal-band's Website in Tokyo. Nothing much happening there. Sachiho was doing TV tabloid shows. Hukie had gone into production. Ako was in the studio for a solo album. Sayoko was pregnant. Again.

Starlitz tried his hotlist and found a new satellite JPEG file of developments on the ground in Bosnia. Starlitz was becoming very interested in Bosnia. He hadn't been there yet, but he could feel the lure increasing steadily. The Japanese scene was basically over. Once the real-estate bubble had busted, the glitz had run out of the Tokyo street-party and now the high yen was chasing the gaijin off. But Bosnia was clearly a very coming scene for the mid-90s. Not Bosnia per se (unless you were a merc, or crazy) but the surrounding safe-areas where the arms and narco people were setting up: Slovenia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania.

Practically every entity that Starlitz found of interest was involved in the Bosnian scene. UN. USA. NATO. European Union. Russian intelligence,

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Russia mafia (interlocking directorates there). Germans. Turks. Greeks. Ndrangheta. Camorra. Israelis. Saudis. Iranians. Moslem Brotherhood. An enormous gaggle of mercs. There was even a happening Serbian folk-metal scene where Serb chicks went gigging for hooting audiences of war criminals. It was cool the way the Yugoslav scene kept re-complicating. It was his kind of scene.

Raf emerged from the bathroom. He'd shaved and had caught his thinning wet hair in a ponytail clip. He wore his jeans; his waistline sagged but there was muscle in his hairy shoulders.

Raf unzipped one of the sports bags. He tunneled into a baggy black T-shirt.

Starlitz logged off.

Raf yawned. "Dramamine never works. Sorry."

"No problem, Raf."

Raf gazed around the apartment. The pupils of his dark eyes were two shrunken pinpoints. "Where's the girl?"

Starlitz shrugged. "Maybe she went out to cop some Chinese."

Raf found his shades and a packet of Gauloise. Raf might have been Italian. The accent made this seem plausible. "The boot of the car," he said. "Could you help?"

They hauled a big wrapped tarpaulin from the trunk of the Fiat and into the safe-house. Raf deftly untied the tarp and spread its contents across the chill linoleum of the kitchenette.

Rifles. Pistols. Ammo. Grenades. Plastique. Fuse wire. Detonator. Starlitz examined the arsenal skeptically. The hardware looked rather dated.

Raf deftly reassembled a stripped and greased AK-47. The rifle looked like it had been buried for several years, but buried by someone who knew how to bury weapons properly. Raf slotted the curved magazine and patted the tarnished wooden butt.

"Ever seen a Pancor Jackhammer?" asked Starlitz. "Modern gas-powered combat shotgun, all-plastic, bullpup design? Does four twelve-gauge rounds a second. The ammo drums double as landmines."

Raf nodded. "Yes, I do the trade shows. But you know — as a practical matter — you have to *let people know* that you can kill them."

"Yeah? Why is that?"

"Everyone knows the classic AK silhouette. You show civilians the AK — " Raf brandished the rifle expertly — "they throw themselves on the

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floor. You bring in your modern plastic auto-shotgun, they think it's a vacuum cleaner."

"I take your point."

Raf lifted a bomb-clustered khaki webbing belt. "See these pineapples? Grenades like these, they have inferior killing radius, but they truly *look like grenades*. What was your name again, my friend?"

"Starlitz."

"Starlet, you carry these pineapples on your belt into a bank or a hotel lobby, you will never have to use them. Because people *know* pineapples. Of course, when you *use* grenades, you don't want to use these silly things. You want these rifle-mounted BG-15s, with the rocket propellant."

Starlitz examined the scraped and greasy rifle-grenades. The cylindrical explosive tubes looked very much like welding equipment, except for the stenciled military Cyrillic. "Those been kicking around a while?"

"The Basques swear by them. They work a charm against armored limos."

"Basque. I hear that language is even weirder than Finnish."

"You carry a gun, Starlet?"

"Not at the mo'."

"Take one little gun," said Raf generously. "Take that Makarov nine-millimeter. Nice combat handgun. Vintage Czech ammo. Very powerful."

"Maybe later," Starlitz said. "I might appropriate a key or so of that plastique. If you don't mind."

Raf smiled. "Why?"

"It's really hard finding good Semtex since Havel shut down the factories," Starlitz said moodily. "I might feel the need 'cause...I got this certain personal problem with video installations."

"Have a cigarette," said Raf sympathetically, shaking his pack. "I can see that you need one."

"Thanks." Starlitz lit a Gauloise. "Video's all over the place nowadays. Banks got videos...hotels got videos...groceries...cash machines...cop cars...Man, I *hate* video. I always hated video. Nowadays, video is really getting on my nerves."

"It's panoptic surveillance," said Raf. "It's the Spectacle."

Starlitz blew smoke and grunted.

"We should discuss this matter further," Raf said intently. "Work in the Struggle requires a solid theoretical grounding. Then you can focus this

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instinctive proletarian resentment into a coherent revolutionary response." He began sawing through a wrapped brick of Semtex with a butterknife from the kitchen drawer.

Starlitz ripped the plastique to chunks and stuffed them into his baggy pockets.

The door opened. Aino had returned. She had a companion: a very tall and spectrally pale young Finn with an enormous cotton-candy wad of steely purple hair. He wore a pearl-buttoned cowboy shirt and leather jeans. A large gold ring pierced his nasal septum and hung over his upper lip.

"Who is this?" smiled Raf, swiftly tucking the Makarov into the back of his belt.

"This is Eero," said Aino. "He programs. For the movement."

Eero gazed at the floor with a diffident shrug. "Many people are better hackers than myself." His eyes widened suddenly. "Oh. Nice guns!"

"This is our safe house," said Raf.

Eero nodded. The tip of his tongue stole out and played nervously with the dangling gold ring.

"Eero came quickly so we could get started at once," Aino said. She looked at the greasy arsenal with mild disdain, the way one might look at a large set of unattractive wedding china. "Now where is the money?"

Starlitz and Raf exchanged glances.

"I think what Raf is trying to say," said Starlitz gently, "is that traditionally you don't bring a contact to the safehouse. Safehouses are for storing weapons and sleeping. You meet contacts in open-air situations or public locales. It's just a standard way of doing business."

Aino was wounded. "Eero's okay! We can trust him. Eero's in my sociology class."

"I'm sure Eero is fine," said Raf serenely.

"He brought a cell-phone," Starlitz said, glancing at the holster on Eero's chrome-studded leather belt. "Cops and spooks can track people's movements through mobile cellphones."

"It's all right," Raf said gallantly. "Eero is your friend, my dear, so we trust him. Next time we are a bit more careful with our operational technique. Okay?" Raf spread his hands, judiciously. "Comrade Eero, since you're here, take a little something. Have a grenade."

"Truly?" said Eero, with a self-effacing smile. "Thank you." He tried stuffing a pineapple, without success, into the tight leather pocket of his jeans.

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"Where is the money?" Aino repeated.

Raf shook his head gently. "I'm sure Mister Starlet is not so foolish to bring so much cash to our first meeting."

"The cash is at a dead drop," Starlitz said. "That's a standard method of transferral. That way, if you're surveilled, the oppo can't make out your contacts."

"The tactical teachings of good old Patrice Lumumba University," said Raf cheerfully. "You were an alumnus, Starlet?"

"Nope," said Starlitz. "Never was the Joe College type. But the Russian mob's chock-full of Lumumba grads."

"I understand this money transfer tactic," murmured Eero, swinging the grenade awkwardly at the end of one bony wrist. "It's like an anonymous remailer at an Internet site. Removing accountability."

"Is the money in US dollars?" said Aino.

Raf pursed his lips. "We don't accept any so-called dollars that come from Russia, remember? Too much fresh ink."

"It's in yen," said Starlitz. "Three point two million US."

Raf brightened. "Point two?"

"It was three mill when we finalized the deal, but the yen had another uptick. Consider it a little gift from our Tokyo contacts. Don't launder it all in one place."

"That's good news," said Aino, with a tender smile.

Starlitz turned to Eero. "Is that enough bread to get you and your friends set up in the Ålands with the networked Suns?"

Eero blinked limpidly. "The workstations have all arrived safely. No more problems in America with computer export restrictions. We could ship American computers straight to Russia if we liked."

"That's swell. Any problem getting proper crypto?"

Eero picked at a purple wisp of hair with his free hand. "The Dutch have been most understanding."

"Any problem leasing the bank building in the Ålands, then?"

"We *bought* the building. With money to spare. It was a cannery, but the Baltic has been driftnetted, so...." Eero shrugged his bony shoulders. "It has a little Turkish restaurant next door. So the programmers have plenty of pilaf and shashlik. Finn programmers... we like our pilaf."

"Pilaf!" Raf enthused, all jolliness. "I haven't had a decent pilaf since Beirut."

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Starlitz narrowed his eyes. "How about your personnel? Any problems there?"

Eero nodded. "We wish we had more people on the start-up, of course. Technical start-ups always want more people. Still, we have enough Finnish hackers to boot and run your banking system. We are mostly very young people, but if those Russian maths professors can log in from Leningrad — sorry, Petersburg — then we should have no big problems. The Russian maths people, they were all unemployed unfortunately for them. But they are very good programmers, very solid skills. The only problem with our many young hackers from Finland...." Eero absently switched the grenade from hand to hand. "Well, we are so very excited about the first true Internet money-laundry. We tried very hard not to talk, not to tell anyone what we are doing, but... well, we're so proud of the work."

"Tell your mouse-jockeys to sit on the news a while longer," Starlitz said.

"Really, it's too late," Eero told him meekly.

Starlitz frowned. "Well, how many goddamn people have you Finn cowboys let in on this thing, for Christ's sake?"

"How many people read the alt newsgroups?" Eero said. "I don't have those figures, but there's alt.hack, alt.2600, alt.smash.the.state, alt.fan.blacknet.... Many."

Starlitz ran his hand over his head. "Right," he said. Like most Internet disasters, the situation was a fait accompli. "Okay, that development has torn it big-time. Aino, you did right to bring this guy here right away. The hell with proper operational protocol. We gotta get that bank up and running as soon as possible."

"There's nothing wrong with publicity," Raf said. "We need publicity to attract business."

"There'll be business all right," Starlitz said. "The Russian mob is already running the biggest money-laundry since the Second World War. The arms and narco crowd worldwide are banging down the doors. Black electronic cash is a vital component of the emergent global system. The point is — we got a very narrow window of opportunity here. If our little crowd is gonna get anything out of this set-up, we have gotta be there with a functional online money-laundry just when the system really needs one. And just before *everybody else* realizes that."

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"Then publicity is vital," Raf insisted. "Publicity is our oxygen! With a major development like this one, you must seize and create your own headlines. It's like Leila Khaled always says: 'The world has to hear our voice.'"

Aino blinked. "Is Leila Khaled still alive?"

"Leila lives!" Raf said. "Wonderful woman, Leila Khaled. She does social work in Damascus with the orphans of the Intifada. Soon she will be in the new Palestinian government."

"Leila Khaled," said Aino thoughtfully. "I envy her historical experience so much. There's something so direct and healthy and physical about hijacking planes."

Eero couldn't seem to find a place inside his clothing for the grenade. Finally he placed it daintily on the kitchen counter and regarded it with morose respect.

"Any other questions?" Raf asked Starlitz.

"Yeah, plenty," Starlitz said. "The Organizatsiya's got their pet Russian math professors working the technical problems. I figure the Russians can hack the math — Russians do great at that. But black-market online money laundering is a *commercial customer service* operation. Customer service is definitely not a Russian specialty."

"So?"

"So we can't hang around waiting for clearance from Moscow Mafia muckety-mucks. If this scheme is gonna work, we gotta slam it together and get it online pronto. We need quick results."

"Then you have the right man," said Raf briskly. "I always specialize in quick results." He shook Eero's hand. "You've been very helpful, Eero. It was pleasant to meet you. Enjoy your stay in the islands. We look forward to further constructive contacts. *Viva la revolucion digitale!* Goodbye and good luck."

"You don't have the big money for us yet?" Eero said.

"Real soon now," Starlitz said.

"Could I have some cab fare please?"

Starlitz gave him a 100-mark Jean Sibelius banknote. "Hei hei," Eero said, with a melancholy smile. He tucked the note into his cowboy shirt pocket and left.

Starlitz saw the hacker to the door, and checked the street as the cadaverous Finn ambled off. He was unsurprised to see Khoklov's two

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bodyguards lurking clumsily in a white Hertz rental car, parked up the street. Presumably they were relaying signals from the plethora of covert listening devices that the Russians had installed in Raf's safe-house.

Eero drifted past the Russian mobsters in a daze of hacker self-absorption. Starlitz found the kid an interesting specimen. In Japan there were plenty of major Goth kids, but the vampire people-in-black contingent had never really crossbred with Japan's hacker population. Here in Finland, though, there were somber and lugubrious hairsprayed Cure fans pretty much across the social spectrum: car repair guys, hotel staff, pizza delivery, government clerks, the works.

When Starlitz returned, Raf was hunting in the kitchen for coffee. "Aino, let's review the political situation."

Aino perched obediently on a birchwood kitchen stool. "The Åland Islands are a chain in the Gulf of Bothnia between Finland and Sweden. They include Åland, Föglö, Kökar, Sottunga, Kumlinge, and Brändö."

"Yeah, right, okay," Starlitz grunted.

"The largest city is Mariehamm with ten thousand inhabitants." She paused. "That's where the autonomous digital bank will be established."

"We're doing great so far."

"There are twenty-five thousand Åland citizens, mostly farmers and fishery people, but thirty percent are engaged in the tourist industry. They run small-scale casinos and duty-free shops. The Ålands are a popular day-tripping destination from continental Europe."

Starlitz nodded. He'd seen the shortlist of potential candidates for a Russian offshore banking set-up. The Ålands offered the tastiest possibilities.

Aino sat up straighter. "The inhabitants are Swedish-speaking ethnics. In 1920, against their will and against a popular plebiscite, they were ceded to Finland as part of a negotiated settlement by the now-extinct League of Nations. In truth these oppressed people are neither Swedes nor Finns. They are Ålanders."

"The islands' national liberation will proceed along two fronts," said Raf, deftly setting a coffeepot to boil. "The first is the Åland Island Liberation Front, which is, essentially, my operation. The second front is Aino's people from the university, the Suomi Anti-Imperialist Cells, who make it their cause to end the shameful injustice of Finnish imperialism. The outbreak of armed struggle and a terror campaign will provoke domestic crisis in Finland.

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The cheapest and easiest apparent solution will be to grant full autonomy to the Ålands. Since the islands are an easy day-trip from Petersburg, this will leave the Organizatsiya with a free hand for their banking operations."

"You're a busy guy, Raf."

"I've been resting on my laurels long enough," said Raf, carefully rinsing three spanking-new coffee mugs. "It's a new Europe now. Many fantastic new opportunities."

"Level with me. Do any of these Åland Island hicks really want independence? They seem to be doing okay just as they are."

Raf, surprised at the question, smiled.

Aino frowned. "Much work remains to be done in the way of raising revolutionary consciousness in the Ålands. But we in the Suomi Anti-Imperialist Cells will have the resources to do that political work. Victory will be ours, because the Finnish liberal-fascist state does not have the capacity to restrain a captive nation against its will. Or if they *do* — " She smiled bitterly. "That will demonstrate the tenuousness of the current Finnish regime and its basic failure as a European state."

"Who have we got on the ground in the Ålands who can speak their local weirdo version of Swedish? Just in case we need to, like, phone in a claim or something."

"We have three people," Raf said. "The new premier, the new foreign minister, and of course the new economics minister, who will be in charge of easing things for the Russian operations. They are the shadow cabinet of the Ålands Republic."

"*Three* people?"

"Three people are plenty! There are only twenty-five thousand of them total. If the projections are right, the offshore bank will be clearing twenty-five million dollars in the first six months! Those islands are little rocks. It's potatoes and fish and casinos for rich Germans. The locals aren't players. The mob and their friends can buy them all."

"They matter," Aino said. "They matter to the Movement."

"But of course."

"The Ålands *deserve* their nation. If they don't deserve their nation, then *we Finns* don't deserve our nation. There are only five million Finns."

"We always yield to political principle," said Raf indulgently. He passed her a brimming mug. "Drink your coffee. You need to go to work."

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Aino glanced at her watch, surprised. "Oh. Yes."

"Shall I cut the hash into gram bags? Or will you take the brick?"

She blinked. "You don't have to cut it, Raffi. They can cut it at the bar."

Raf opened one of the sports bags and passed her a fat brick of dope neatly wrapped in a Copenhagen newspaper.

"You work in a bar? That's a good cover job," Starlitz said. "What kind of hash is that?"

"Something very new in Europe," Raf said. "It's Azerbaijani hash."

"Ex-Soviet hash isn't really very good," sniffed Aino. "They don't know how to do it right.... I don't like to sell hash. But if you sell people drugs, then they respect you. They won't talk about you when cops come. I hate cops. Cops are fascist torturers. They should all be shot. Do you need the car, Raf?"

"Take the car," Raf said.

Aino fetched her purse and left the safehouse.

"Interesting girl," commented Starlitz, in the sudden empty silence. "Never heard of any Finn terror groups before. Germans, French, Irish, Basques, Croats, Italians. Never Finns, though."

"They're a bit behind the times in this corner of Europe. She's one of the new breed. Very brave. Very determined. It's a hard life for terrorist women." Raf carefully sugared his coffee. "Women never get proper credit. Women kidnap ministers, women blow up trains — women do very well at the work. But no one calls them 'armed revolutionaries.' They're always — what does the press say? — 'maladjusted female neurotics.' Or ugly hardened lesbians with a father-figure complex. Or cute little innocents, seduced and brainwashed by the wrong sort of man." He snorted.

"Why do you say that?" Starlitz said.

"I'm a man of my generation, you know." Raf sipped his coffee. "Once, I wasn't advanced in my feminist thinking. It was being close to Ulrike that raised my consciousness. Ulrike Meinhoff. A wonderful girl. Gifted journalist. Smart. Eloquent. Very ruthless. Quite good-looking. But Baader and that other one — what was her name? They treated her so badly. Always yelling at her in the safehouse — calling her a gutless intellectual, spoilt child of the bourgeoisie and so forth. My God, aren't we all spoilt children of the bourgeoisie? If the bourgeoisie hadn't made a botch of us, we wouldn't need to kill them."

A car pulled up outside. The engine died and doors slammed.

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Starlitz walked to the front window, peeked through the blind.

"It's the yuppies from next door," he said. "Looks like they're home early."

"We should introduce ourselves," Raf said. He began combing his hair.

"Uh-oh, scratch that," Starlitz said. "That's the guy who lives next door all right, but that's not the woman. He's got a different woman."

"A girlfriend?" Raf said with interest.

"Well, it's a much younger woman. In a wig, net hose and red high heels." The door in the next duplex opened and slammed. A stereo came on. It was playing a hot Cuban rhumba.

"This is a golden opportunity," said Raf, shoving his coffee mug aside. "Let's introduce ourselves now as his new neighbors. He'll be very embarrassed. He'll never look at us again. He'll never question us. Also, he'll keep his wife away from us."

"That's a good tactic," Starlitz said.

"All right. Let me do the talking." Raf went to the door.

"You still got that Makarov in the back of your belt, man."

"Oh yes. Sorry." Raf tossed the pistol onto the sleek Finnish couch.

Raf opened the front door. Then he back-stepped deftly back into the apartment and shut the door firmly. "There's a white rental car on the street."

"Yeah?"

"Two men inside it."

"Yeah?"

"Someone just shot them."

Starlitz hurried to the window. There were half a dozen people clustered across the street. Two of them had just murdered Khoklov's bodyguards, suddenly emptying silenced pistols through the closed glass of the windows. The street was not entirely deserted, but killing people with silenced pistols was a remarkably unobtrusive affair if done with brio and accuracy.

Four men began crossing the street. They wore jeans, jogging shoes, and, despite the heat, box-cut Giorgio Armani blazers. Two of them were carrying dainty little videocams. All of them were carrying guns.

"Zionists," Raf announced. Briskly, but without haste, he retreated to his arsenal on the kitchen floor. He slung an AK over his shoulder, propped a second assault rifle within easy reach, then knelt around the corner of the kitchen wall, giving himself a clear line of fire at the front door.

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Starlitz quickly weighed various possibilities. He decided to keep watching the window.

With swift and deadly purpose, the hit-team marched to the adjoining duplex. The door broke off its hinges as they kicked their way in. There were brief yelps of indignant surprise, and a quiet multiple stuttering. A burst of Uzi slugs pierced the adjoining wall and embedded themselves in the floor.

Raf rose to his feet, his plump face the picture of glee. He touched one finger to his lips.

Footsteps clomped rapidly up and down the stairs in the next apartment. Doors banged, drawers opened. A bedside telephone jangled as it was knocked from its table. In three minutes the hit-team was out the door.

Raf scurried to the window and knelt. He'd grabbed a small pocket Nikon from his sports bag. He clicked off a roll of snapshots as the hit squad retreated. "I'm so tempted to shoot them," he said, hitching the sling of his assault rifle, "but this is better. This is very funny."

"That was Mossad, right?"

"Yes. They thought I was the neighbor."

"They must have had a description of you and the girl. And they know you're here in Finland, man. That's not good news."

"Let's phone in a credit for their hit. The Helsinki police might catch them. That would be lovely. Where is that cellphone?"

"Look, we were extremely lucky just now. We'd better leave."

"I'm always lucky. We have plenty of time." Raf gazed at his arsenal and sighed. "I hate to abandon these guns, but we have no car to carry them. Let's carry the guns next door, before we go! That should win us some nice press."

STARLITZ MET WITH KHOKLOV at two A.M. The midnight sun had given up its doomed attempt to sink and was now rising again in refulgent splendor. The two of them were strolling the spectrally abandoned streets of Helsinki, not too far from Khoklov's posh suite at the Arctia.

As European capitals went, Helsinki was a very young town. Most of it had been built since 1900, and quite a lot of that had been leveled by Russian bombers in the 1940s. Nevertheless the waterfront streets looked like stage-sets for the Pied Piper of Hamelin, all copper-gabled roofs and leaded glass and quaint window turrets.

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"I miss my boys," Khoklov grumbled. "Why did they have to ice my boys? Stupid bastards."

"Lot of Russian Jews in Israel now. Israel's very hip to the Russian mafia scene. Maybe it was a message."

"No. They're just out of practice. They thought my boys were guarding Raf. They thought that poor fat Finn was Raf. Raf makes them nervous. He's been on their hit-list since the Munich Olympics."

"How'd they know Raf was here?"

"It's those hackers at the bank. They've been talking too much. Three of our depositors are big Israeli arms dealers." Khoklov was tired. He'd been up all night explaining developments by phone to an anxious cabal of millionaire ex-Chekists in Petersburg.

"Since the word is out, we've got to move this into high gear, ace."

"I know that only too well." Khoklov opened a gunmetal pillbox and dry-swallowed a pink tab. "The Higher Circles in Organizatsiya — they love the idea of black electronic cash, but they're old-fashioned and skeptical. They say they want quick results, and yet they give me trouble about financing."

"I never expected those nomenklatura cats to come through for us," Starlitz said. "They're all ex-KGB bureaucrats, as slow as hell. If the Japanese shakedown works, we'll have the capital all right. You say they want results? What kind of results exactly?"

"You've met our golden boy now," said Khoklov. "What did you think of him? Be frank."

Starlitz weighed his words. "I think we're better off without him. We don't need him for a gig like this. He's over-qualified."

"He's good though, isn't he? A real professional. And he's always lucky. Lucky is better than good."

"Look, Pulat Romanevich. We've known each other quite a while, so I'm going to level with you. This guy is not right for the job. This Ålands coup is a business thing, we're trying to hack the structure of multinational cash-flows. It's the Infobahn. It's the ninties. It's borderless and it's happening. It's a high-risk start-up, sure, but so what? All Infobahn stuff is like that. It's global business, it's okay. But this is not a global business guy you've got here. This guy is a fuckin' golem. You used to arm him and pay him way back when. I'm sure he looked like some Che Guevara hippie poet rebel against capitalist society. But this guy is not an asset."

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"You think he's crazy? Psychopathic? Is that it?"

"Look, those are just words. He's not crazy. He's what he is. He's a jackal. He feeds on dead meat from bigger crooks and spooks, and sometimes he kills rabbits. He thinks straight people are sheep. He's got it in for consumer society. Enough to blow up our potential customers and laugh about it. The guy is a nihilist."

Khoklov walked half a block in silence, shoulders hunched within his linen jacket. "You know something?" he said suddenly. "The world has gone completely crazy. I used to fly MiGs for the Soviet Union. I dropped a lot of bombs on Moslems, and I got medals. The pay was all right. I haven't flown a jet in combat in eight years. But I loved that life. It suited me, it really did. I miss it every day."

Starlitz said nothing.

"Now we call ourselves Russia. As if that could help us. We can't feed ourselves. We can't house ourselves. We can't even exterminate a lousy bunch of fucking Chechnians. It's just like with these fucking Finns! We owned them for eighty years. Then the Finns got smart with us. So we rolled in with tanks and the sons of bitches ran into their forests in the dark and the snow, and they kicked our ass! Even after we finally crushed them, and stole the best part of their country, they just came right back! Now it's fifty years later, and the Russian Federation owes Finland a billion dollars. There are only five million Finns! My country owes every single Finn two hundred dollars each!"

"It's that Marxist thing, ace." They walked on in silence.

"We're past the Marxist thing," said Khoklov, warming to his theme as the pill took hold. "Now it's different. This time Russia has a kind of craziness that is truly big enough and bad enough to take over the whole world. Massive, total, institutional corruption. Top to bottom. Nothing held back. A new kind of absolute corruption that will sell *anything*: the flesh of our women, the future of our children. Everything inside our museums and our churches. Anything goes for money: gold, oil, arms, dope, nukes. We'll sell the soil and the forests and the Russian sky. We'll sell our souls."

They passed the bizarre polychrome facade of a Finnish-Mexican restaurant. "Listen, ace," Starlitz said. "If it's the soul thing that's got you down, this guy won't help you there. It was a serious mistake to break him out of mothballs. You should have left him nodding-out in some bar in Baghdad

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listening to Bee Gees on vinyl. I don't know what you'll do about him now. You might try to bribe him with some kind of major ransom money, and hope he gets too drunk to move. But I don't think he'll do that for you. Bribes just flatter him."

"Okay," Khoklov said. "I agree. He's too dangerous, and he has too much past. After the coup, we kill him. I owe that much to Ilya and Lev, anyway."

"I appreciate that sentiment, but it's kinda late now, ace. You should have iced him when we knew where he was staying."

There was a distant hollow thump.

The Russian cocked his head. "Was that mortar fire?"

"Car bomb, maybe?" In the blue and lucid distance, filthy smoke began to rise.

Raf claimed that the abortive Israeli hit had been the twelfth attempt on his life. This might have been stretching the truth. It was only the second time that a Mossad hit-team had shot the wrong man in a neutral Scandinavian country.

Russians hated to commit themselves fully to a project. Seventy years of totalitarianism had left them with a terrific appetite for back-tracking, doublespeak and doublecross. Raf, however, delighted in providing quick results.

Granted, his Ålands liberation campaign had had a few tactical setbacks. He'd had to abandon most of his favorite guns with the loss of his first safehouse. The Mossad team had escaped apprehension by the dumbfounded Finnish police. The car-bombing at the FinnAir office had cost Raf his yellow Fiat.

The Suomi Anti-Imperialist Cells excelled at spraying radical political graffiti, but their homemade petrol bombs at the Jyväskylä police station had done only minor damage. The outspoken Helsinki newspaper editor had survived his kneecapping and would probably walk again.

Nevertheless, Raf's ex-KGB sponsors back in Petersburg were impressed with the veteran's initiative and can-do spirit. They'd supplied another payoff.

With a brimming war-chest of mafia-supplied Euro-yen, Raf was on a roll. Raf had successfully infiltrated six Yankee mercs from the little-known but extremely violent American anarcho-rightist underground. Thanks to

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relaxed cross-border inspections in Europe and the dazed preoccupations of America's ninja tobacco inspectors, these Yankee gun-runners had boldly brought Raf an up-to-date and very lethal arsenal of NATO's remaindered best.

Raf also had ten Russian thugs on call. These men were combat-hardened mercenaries from the large contingent of thirty thousand ex-military professionals who guarded Russia's bankers. Russian bankers who were not Mafia-affiliated were shot down in droves by the black marketeers. Russian bankers who were Mafia-affiliated were generally killed by one another. These bankers' bodyguards were enjoying a booming trade. Being bodyguards, they naturally excelled at assassination.

These dangerous cliques of armed alien agitators would have been near-useless in Finland without the protection of locals on the ground. Raf had the Suomi Anti-Imperialist Cells to cover that front. The Suomi Anti-Imperialist Cells consisted of five hard-core undergraduates, plus a loose group of young fellow-travelers who would probably offer aide and shelter if pressed. The Cells also had an ideological guru, a radical Finnish nationalist professor and poet who had no real idea what his teachings had wrought among his nation's postmodern youth.

So Raf had twenty or so people ready to use guns and bombs at his direction. To the uninitiated, this might not have seemed an impressive force. However, by the conventional standards of European terrorism, Raf was doing splendidly. National movements such as ETA, IRA, and PLO tended to be somewhat larger, due to their extensive labor-pool of the embittered and oppressed, but Raf the Jackal was a creature of a different breed: a true revolutionary internationalist, a freelance with a dozen passports. His Åland Island Liberation Front was big. It was bigger than Germany's Baader-Meinhof. It was bigger than France's Action Directe. It was about as big as the Japanese Red Army, and considerably better financed. A group of this sort could change history. A far more primitive conspiracy had murdered Abraham Lincoln.

Starlitz was listening to international Finland Radio on the shortwave. It was tough to find decent English-language coverage of the ongoing terror campaign. Despite their continued selfless service in the UN blue-helmet contingent, neutral Finland didn't have a lot of foreign friends. The internal troubles of a neutral country didn't compel much general interest.

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This would likely change, however, now that Raf had brought in outside experts. Raf was giving his Yankee new-hires an extensive rundown on the theory and practice of detonating acetylene bottles.

Aino had rented the state-supported handicrafts center through the good offices of her student activist group. The walls of the terrorist hideaway were covered with weird woolly hangings, massive hand-saws, pine-tar soaps and eldritch Finnish glassware.

Aino was fully up-to-speed on improvised demolitions, so she had been appointed a look-out. She sat near a second-floor window overlooking the driveway, with a monster Finnish elk-rifle at hand. The job was tedious. Aino was leafing through a stack of English-language Flüüvin books which Starlitz had picked up at a Helsinki bookstore. Helsinki boasted bookstores half the size of aircraft hangars. The book thing was something to do during those long dark winters.

"How many of these did she write?" Aino said.

"Twenty-five. The hottest sellers are *Froofies Go to Sea* and *Papa Froofy and the Mushroom Tigers.*"

"They seem even stranger in English. It's strange that she cares so much about her little blue creatures. She worries about them so much, and gets so emotionally touched about them, and they don't even really exist." Aino flipped through the pages. "Look, here the Flüüvins are walking through the fire-mists on big stilts. That's a good picture. And look! There's that cave creature that carries the harmonica and complains all the time."

"That would be Speffy the Nerkulen."

"Speffy the Nerkulen." Aino frowned. "That isn't a proper Finnish name. It isn't Swedish either. Not even Åland Swedish."

Starlitz turned off the shortwave, which was detailing Finnish agricultural production. "She imagined Speffy, that's all. Speffy the Nerkulen just popped out of her little gray head. But Speffy the Nerkulen sure moves major product in Hokkaido."

Aino riffled the pages of the paperback. "I could make a book like this. She wrote this book fifty years ago. She was my age when she wrote and drew this book. I could do this myself."

"Why do you say that?"

She looked up. "Because I could, I know I could. I can draw. I can tell stories. I'm always telling stories to people at the bar. Once I did a band poster."

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"That's swell. How'd you like to come along with me and brace up the little old lady? I need a Finnish translator, and a former Froofy fan would be great. Besides, she can give you helpful tips on kid-lit."

Aino looked at him, surprised. Slowly, she frowned. "What are you saying? I'm a revolutionary soldier. You should respect my political commitment. You wouldn't talk to me that way if I was a twenty-year-old boy."

"If you were a twenty-year-old boy, you'd fuckin' spit on Speffy the Nerkulen."

"No I wouldn't."

"Yes you would. Young soldier boys are cheaper than dirt. They're a fuckin' commodity. Who needs 'em? But a young female Froofy fan could be a very useful cut-out in some dicey negotiations."

"You're still lying to me. You should stop. I'm not fooled."

Starlitz sighed. "Look. It's the truth. Try and get it straight. You think the Åland Islands are important, right? Important enough to blow up trains for. Well, Speffy the Nerkulen is the most important thing that ever came out of the Åland Islands. Froofies are the only Ålands product that you can't obtain anywhere else. Twenty-five thousand hick fishermen in the Baltic are doing *great* to produce a major worldwide pop hit like Speffy the Nerkulen. If the Ålands were Jamaica, he'd be Bob Marley."

One of Raf's new recruits entered the room. He was bearded and muscular, maybe thirty. He wore a Confederate flag T-shirt and carried a Colt automatic in a belt holster. "Hey," he said. "Y'all speak English?"

"Yo," said Starlitz.

"Where's the can?"

Starlitz pointed.

"Hey babe," said the American, pausing. "That's a lady's rifle. You say the word, I'll give you something serious to shoot with."

Aino said nothing. Her grip tightened on the rifle's polished walnut stock.

The American grinned at Starlitz. "She's got no English, huh? She's a Russian, right? I heard there'd be lots of Russian chicks in this operation. Man. What a dollar'll do these days." He rubbed his hands.

"Posse Comitatus?" Starlitz hazarded.

"Aw hell no. We're not militia. Those militia boys, they're all in a sweat over UN black helicopters and the New World Order.... That's bullshit! We

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know the New World Order. We got contacts. We're gonna be *inside* the goddamn black helicopters. Shoulder to shoulder with Ivan, this time!"

Finland had the most expensive booze in the world. This was Finnish social democratic policy, part and parcel with the world's lowest infant mortality rate. Nevertheless, Finns were truly fabulous drunks. The little Kasarmikatu bar was jammed with Finns methodically transiting from modest self-effacement to chest-pounding no-brakes bravado. A television barked above the shining racks of vodka and koskenkorva, showing broadcast news from across the Baltic. Another Parliamentary crisis in Moscow. A furious Russian delegate was pounding the podium in a blue vinyl jacket and a Megadeth T-shirt.

The Japanese financier set down his apple juice and adjusted his sunglasses. "His Holiness the Master does not approve of drunkenness. Alcohol clouds the vision and occludes the flow of ki."

"I can't believe we found a Japanese who won't drink after a business deal," Khoklov bitched in Russian. The Japanese money-man didn't speak or understand Russian. The three of them were clustered in the darkest corner of the Helsinki bar.

Starlitz spoke in Russian. "Our star depositor here has got a very severe case of that Pacific Rim New Age thing. These Supreme Truth guys are completely nuts. However, they're richer than God."

Starlitz silently toasted the money-man with a shot of Finnish cranberry vodka. He'd convinced their backer that this pulverizing liquor was cranberry juice. He switched to fluent gutter Japanese. "Khoklov-san tells me that he admires your electric skullcap very much. He wants to try one for himself. He is seeking health benefits and increased peace of mind."

"Saaaaa..." riposted Mr. Inoue, patting the plasticized top of his shaven head. "The electroneural stabilizers of His Holiness the Master. They will soon be in mass production at our Fuji fortress."

"You got like a kids' version of those, right?" said Starlitz.

"Of course. His Holiness the Master has many children."

"So have you ever considered, like, a pop commercial version of those gizmos? Like with maybe a fully licensed cartoon character?"

Mr Inoue blinked. "I was led to understand that Mister Khoklov's associates could supply us with military helicopters."

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"The son of a bitch is on about the helicopters again," Starlitz explained in Russian.

Khoklov grunted. "Tell him we have a special on T-72 main battle tanks. Twenty million yen apiece. Just for him though. No resales."

Starlitz conferred at length with Mr. Inoue. "He's not interested in tanks. He wants at least six Mil-17 choppers with poison gas dispensers. Also some Spetsnaz Ranger vets to train the cult's judo commando unit on their sacred island of Ishigakijima."

"Spetsnaz veterans? Very well. We've got plenty. Tell him he'll have to find them visas and put up earnest money. Those black berets aren't your average goons."

Starlitz conferred again. "He wants to know if you know anything about laser ablation uranium-enrichment techniques."

"Nyet. And I'm getting pretty tired of that question."

"He wants to know if you're interested in learning how they do that sort of thing at Mitsubishi Heavy Industries."

Khoklov groaned. "Tell him I appreciate the lead on industrial atomic espionage, but that crap went out with Klaus Fuchs and the Rosenbergs."

Starlitz sighed. "Let's give Inoue-san a little face here, Pulat Romanevich. His Holiness the Master predicts the world will end in 1997. We play along with the cult's loony apocalypse myths, and we can lock in their deposits all the way through winter '96."

"Why do we need this plastic-headed lunatic?" Khoklov said. "He's a crooked exploiter of the gullible masses. He's running dummy companies inside Russia and recruiting Russian suckers for his ridiculous yoga cult. He needs us more than we need him. He's a long way from home. Put the strong-arm on him."

"Listen, ace. We need the cult's deposit money, because we need that yen disparity to cover the flow of black capital. Besides, I'm the Tokyo liaison for this gig! It's true the mafia could break his knees inside Russia, but back in Japan, his pals are building big stainless-steel bunkers full of giant microwaves."

"There are limits to my credulity, you know," Khoklov said testily. "Botulism breweries? Nerve gas factories? Hundreds of brainwashed New Age robots building computer chips for a half-blind master criminal in white pajamas? It's completely absurd, it's like something out of James Bond. Please inform this clown that he's dealing with real-life professionals."

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Starlitz raised his hand and signaled. "Check please."

"Here you are sir," said Aino. "I hope you and your foreign friends are enjoying your stay in hospitable Helsinki."

AFTER THE HELSINKI DISCO bombing, Raf moved his center of operations to the Ålands proper. The hardworking youngsters of the S.A-I.C. had found him another bolthole — a sauna retreat in the dense woods of Kökar island. This posh resort belonged to a Swedish arms corporation who had once used it to entertain members of various Third World defense departments. Handy day-trips into the Ålands had assured them privacy and avoided potential political embarrassments on Swedish soil. This Swedish company had fallen on hard times due to the massive Russian bargain-basement armaments sales. They were happy to sublet their resort to Khoklov's well-heeled shell company.

"We can't all be Leninist ascetics," Raf declared cheerily. "One can still be a revolutionary in decent shoes."

"Decent shoes count for plenty in Russia these days," Starlitz agreed.

Raf leaned back in his lacquered bentwood chair. The resort's central office, with its stained glass windows and maniacally sleek Alvar Aalto furniture, seemed to suit him very well. "We've reached a delicate stage of the revolutionary process," Raf said, lacing his fingers behind his head. "Integrating the dual strike-forces of the liberation front."

"You mean introducing your Yankee guys to your Russian guys?"

"Yes. And what better neutral ground for that encounter than the traditional Finnish sauna?" Raf smiled. "Lads together! Nothing to hide! No clothes. No guns! Just fresh clean steam. And plenty of booze. And since the boys have been training so hard, I've prepared them a nice surprise."

"Women."

Raf chuckled. "They *are* soldiers, you know." He leaned forward onto the desk. "Did you examine this resort? We have certain expectations to keep up!"

Starlitz had examined the resort and the grounds. There had been more hookers through the place than Bofors had heavy machine guns. The grounds were private and extensive. Coups had been launched successfully from less likely places.

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Starlitz nodded. "I get the drill. You know that I have a business appointment with that little old lady today. You set this up this way on purpose, just so I'd miss all the fun."

Raf paused, and thought this over. "You're not angry with me, are you, Starlitz?"

"Why do you say that, Raf?"

"Why be angry with me? I'm loaning you Aino. Isn't that enough? I didn't have to give you a translator for your business scam. I'm trusting you, all alone on a little boat, with my favorite lieutenant. You should be grateful."

Starlitz stared at him. "Man, you're too good to me."

"You should look after Aino. My little jackal has been under strain. I know you are fond of her. Since you took such pains to speak with her behind my back."

"No, I'll leave her here with you tonight," Starlitz offered. "Let's see what your twenty naked, drunken mercs will do with a heavily armed poetry major."

Raf sighed in mock defeat. "Starlitz, you don't bullshit as easily as most really greedy people."

"Good of you to notice, man."

"Of course, I do want you to take Aino away for a while. She's young, and she would misinterpret this. Let's be very frank. These men I bought for us — they are brutal men who kill and die for pay. They must be given rewards and punishments that they can understand. They're whores with guns."

"I'm always happiest when I know the worst, Raf. You haven't told me the worst yet."

"Why should I confide in you? You never confide in me." Raf pushed an ashtray across the desk. "Have a cigarette."

Starlitz took a Gauloise.

Raf lit it with a flourish, then lit his own. "You talk a lot, Starlitz," he said. "You bargain well. But you never talk about yourself. Everything I discovered about you, I have found out through other people." Raf coughed a bit. "For instance, I know that you have a daughter. A daughter that you've never seen."

"Yeah, sure."

"*I* have seen your daughter. I have photos. She's not like you. She's cute."

"You've got photos, man?" Starlitz sat up. "Video?"

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"Yes, I have photos. I have more than that. I have contacts in America who know where your daughter is living. She lives with those strange West Coast women...."

"Yeah, well, I admit they're plenty strange, but it's one of those postnuclear family things," Starlitz said at last.

"Would you like to meet your daughter? I could snatch her and deliver her to you here in the Ålands. That would be easy."

"The arrangement's not so bad as it stands," Starlitz said. "They let me send her kids' books...."

Raf put his sock-clad feet on the desk. "Maybe you need to settle down, Starlitz. When a man gets to a certain age, he has to live with his decisions. Take me, for instance. Basically, I'm a family man."

"Wow."

"That's right. I've been married for twenty years. My wife's in a French prison. They caught her in '78."

"That's a long stretch."

"I have two children. One by my wife, one by a girl in Beirut. People think a man like Raf the Jackal must have no private life. They don't give me credit for my dreams. Did you know I've written journalism? I've even written poetry. Poetry in Italian and Arabic."

"You don't say."

"Oh, but I do say. I will say more, since it's just the two of us. No Russians here at the resort yet, to set up their tiresome bugging networks.... I have a good feeling about you, Starlitz. You and I, we're both postmodern men of the world. We saw an empire break to pieces. That had nothing to do with silly old Karl Marx, you know."

"Could be, man."

"It was the 1990s at work. Breaking up is very infective. It's everywhere now. It's out of control, like AIDS. Did you ever meet a Lebanese warlord? Jumblatt, perhaps? Berri? Splendid fellows. Men like lions."

"Never met 'em."

"That's a very good life, you know — becoming a warlord. It's what happens to terrorists when they grow up."

Starlitz nodded. It was a very dangerous thing to have Raf so worried about his good opinion, but he couldn't help but be pleased.

"You seize a port," Raf explained. "You grow dope. You buy guns. It's like

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a little nation, but you don't need any lawyers, or any bureaucrats, or any admen, or any stupid bastards in suits. You have the guns, and you have the power. You tell them what to do, and they run and do it. Maybe it can't last forever. But as long as it lasts, it's heaven."

"This is good, Raf. You're leveling with me now. I appreciate that, I really do."

"The press says that I like to kill people. Well, *of course* I like to kill people! It's thrilling. It gives your life a heroic dimension. If it wasn't thrilling to kill people, people wouldn't buy tickets to movies where people are killed. But if I wanted to kill, I'd go to Chechnya, Georgia, Abkhazia. That's not the trick. Any idiot can become a warlord inside a war zone. The trick is to become a warlord where people are *fat* and *soft* and *rich!* You want to become a warlord *just outside* a massive, disintegrating empire. This is the perfect spot! I know I've had my little setbacks in the past. But the ninties are the sixtiess upside down. This time, I'm going to win, and *keep* what I win! I'm going to seize these little islands. I'll declare martial law and rule by decree."

"What about your three-man provisional government?"

"I've decided those boys are not reliable. I didn't like the way they talked about me. So, I'll short-cut the process, and produce very quick and decisive results. I'll take twenty-five thousand people hostage."

"How do you manage that?"

"How? By claiming that I have a Russian low-yield nuke, which in fact I don't. But who would dare to try my bluff? I'm Raf the Jackal! I'm the famous Raf! They know I'm capable of that."

"Low yield nuke, huh? I guess the old terrie scenarios are the good ones...."

"Of course I don't have any such nuke. But I do have ten kilos of cheap radioactive cesium. When they fly geiger counters over — or whatever silly scientific thing those SWAT squads use — that will look very convincing. The Finns won't dare risk another Chernobyl. They still glow in the dark from that last one. So I'm being very reasonable, don't you agree? I'm only asking for a few small islands and a few thousand people. I'll observe the proper niceties, if they allow me that. I'll make a nice flag and some coinage."

Starlitz rubbed his chin. "The coinage thing should be especially interesting given the electronic bank angle."

Raf opened a desk drawer and produced a shotglass and a duty-free bottle of Finnish cloudberry liqueur. The booze in the Ålands was vastly cheaper

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than Finland's. "Singapore is only a little island," Raf said, squinting as he poured himself a shot. "Nobody ever complains about Singapore's nuclear weapon."

"I hadn't heard that, man."

"Of course they have one! They've had it for fifteen years. They bought the uranium from the South Africans during apartheid, when the Boers were desperate for money. And they built the trigger themselves. Singaporeans will take that kind of trouble. They are very industrious."

"Makes sense to me." Starlitz paused. "I'm still getting a general handle on your proposal. Give me the long-term vision, Raf. Let's say that you get what you want, and they somehow let you keep it. What then? Give me ten years down the road."

"People always asked me that question," Raf said, sipping. "You want one of these cloudberries? Little golden berries off the Finnish tundra, it surprises me how sweet they are."

"No thanks, but don't let me stop you, man."

"In the old days, people would ask me — mostly these were hostage negotiators, all the talking would get old and we'd all get rather philosophical sometimes...." Raf screwed the cap precisely onto the liqueur bottle. "They'd say to me, Raf, what about this Revolution of yours? What kind of world are you really trying to give us? I've had a long time to consider that question."

"And?"

"Did you ever hear the Jimi Hendrix rendition of 'The Star-Spangled Banner?'"

Starlitz blinked. "Are you kidding? That cut still moves major product off the back catalog."

"Next time, *really listen* to that piece of music. Try to imagine a country where that music *truly was* the national anthem. Not weird, not far-out, not hip, not a parody, not a protest against some war, not for young Yankees stoned on some stupid farm in New York. Where music like that was *social reality*. That is how I want people to live. People are sheep, and they don't have the guts to live that way. But if I get a chance, I can *make* them do it."

Starlitz liked speed launches. Piloting them was almost as much fun as driving. Raf's contacts had stolen one from Copenhagen and motored it across the Baltic at high speed. Since it was a classic dope-smuggler's vehicle, the

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Danish cops would assume it had been hijacked by dope people. They wouldn't be far wrong.

Starlitz examined the nautical map.

"I shot a cop today," Aino said.

Starlitz looked up. "Why do you say that?"

"I shot a cop dead. It was the constable in Mariehamm. I went into his little office. I told him someone stole the spare tire from my car. I took him around the back of his little office to see my car. I opened the trunk, and when he looked inside for the tire, I shot him. Three times. No, four times. He fell right into the trunk. So I threw him in the trunk and shut it. Then I drove away with him."

Starlitz folded the nautical map very carefully. "Did you phone in a credit?"

"No. Raf says it's better if we disappear the cop. We'll say he that defected back to Finland with the secret police files. That will be a good propaganda coup."

"You really iced this guy? Where's the body?"

"It's in this boat," Aino said.

"Take the wheel," said Starlitz. He left the cockpit and looked into the launch's fiberglass hold. There was a very dead man in uniform in it.

Starlitz turned to her. "Raf sent you to ice him all by yourself?"

"No," said Aino proudly, "he sent Matti and Jorma with me, but I made them keep watch outside." She paused. "People lie when they say it's hard to kill. Killing is very simple. You move your finger three times. Or four times. You imagine doing it, and then you plan it, and then you do it. Then it's done."

"How do you plan to deal with the evidence here?"

"We wrap the body in chains that I bought in the hardware store. We drop him into the Baltic between here and the little old lady's island. Here, take the wheel."

Starlitz went back to piloting. Aino hauled the dead cop out of the hold. The corpse outweighed her considerably, but she was strong and determined, and only occasionally squeamish. She hauled the heavy steel chains around the corpse with a series of methodical rattles, stopping every few moments to click them tight with cheap padlocks.

Starlitz watched this procedure while managing the wheel. "Was it Raf's idea to send along a corpse with my negotiations?"

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Aino looked up gravely. "This is the only boat we have. I had to use this boat. We don't seize the ferries until later."

"Raf likes to send a message."

"This is *my* message. I killed this cop. I put him in this boat. He's a uniformed agent from the occupying power. He's a legitimate hard target." Aino tossed back her braids, and sighed. "Take me seriously, Mister Starlitz. I'm a young woman, and I dress like a punk because I like to, and maybe I read too many books. But I mean what I say. I believe in my cause. I come from a small obscure country, and my group is a small obscure group. That doesn't matter, because we are committed. We truly are an armed revolutionary strike force. I'm going to overthrow the government here and take over this country. I killed an oppressor today. That is a duty of an armed revolutionary."

"So you take the islands by force. Then what?"

"Then we'll be rid of these Åland ethnics. They'll be on their own. After that, we Finns can truly be Finns. We'll become a truly Finnish nation, on truly authentic Finnish principles."

"Then what?"

"Then we move into the Finno-Ugric lands that the Russians stole from us! We can take back Karelia. And Komi. And Kanti-Mansiysk." She looked at him and scowled. "You've never even heard of those places. Have you? They're sacred to us. They're in the Kalevala. But you, you've never even heard of them...."

"What happens after that?"

She shrugged. "Is that my problem? I'll never see that dream fulfilled. I think the cops will kill me before then. What do you think?"

"I think these are gonna be kind of touchy book-contract negotiations."

"Stop worrying," Aino said. "You worry too much about trivial things." She gave a last methodical wrap of the chain, and heaved the dead cop overboard. The corpse bobbed face-down in the wake of the boat, then slowly sank from sight.

Aino reached over the fiberglass gunwale and cleaned her hands in the racing seawater. "Just talk slowly to her," she said. "The old lady writes in Swedish, did you know that? I found out all about her. That's her first language, Swedish. But they say her Finnish is very good. For an Ålander."

Starlitz pulled up at the little wooden dock. The entire island, shored in weed-slimed dark granite, was about twenty acres. The little old lady lived

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here with her even older and frailer brother. They'd both been born on the island, and had originally lived with their parents, but the father had died in 1950 and the mother in 1968.

The only access to the island was by boat. There were no phones, no electricity and no plumbing. The home was a two-story stone mansion with a steep slate roof, a stone well and a wooden outhouse. The eaves were carved and painted in yellow and red. There were some chickens and a couple of squat little island sheep. A skinny wooden derrick had a homemade lighthouse, with an oil lantern. A lot of seagulls around.

Starlitz yelled a loud ahoy from the dock, which seemed the most polite approach, but there was no answer from the house. So they trudged up across the rocks and turf, and found the mansion's door and knocked. No response.

Starlitz tried the salt-warped door. It was unlocked. The windows were open and a faint breeze was playing through the parlor. There were hundreds of shelved books in Finnish and Swedish, some fluttering papers, and quite a few cheerily demented oil paintings. Some quite handsome bronze statuary and some framed Finnish theater posters from the 1930s. A wind-up Victrola.

Starlitz opened the hall closet and looked at the rough weather gear — oilskins and boots. "You know something? This little old lady is as tall as a house. She's a goddamned Viking." He left the parlor for the composition room. He found a wooden secretary and a fine velvet chair. Dictionaries, a Swedish encyclopedia. Some well-thumbed travel books and Nordic photography collections. "There's nothing in here," he muttered.

"What are you looking for?" said Aino.

"I dunno exactly. Something to explain how this works."

"Here's a note!" Aino called.

Starlitz went back into the parlor. He took the note, which had been written in copperplate longhand on lined Speffy the Nerkulen novelty notepaper.

"Dear Mister Starlins," read the note, "Please pardon my not here being. I go to Helsingfors to testify. I go to Suomi Parliament as long needing for civic duty call. I regret I must miss you and hoping to speak with you about my many readers in Tokio another much more happier time. Sorry you must row so far and not have meet. Please help your self(s) to tea and biscuits all ready in kitchen. Goodbye!"

"She's gone to Helsinki," Starlitz said.

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"She never travels any more. I'm very surprised." Aino frowned. "She could have saved us a lot of trouble if she had a cellphone."

"Why would they want her in Helsinki?"

"Oh, they made her go there, I suppose. The local Ålanders. The local collaborationist power structure."

"What good do they think she can do? She's not political."

"That's true, but they are very proud of her here. After all, the children's clinic — The Flüüvin's Children's Clinic in Föglö? — that was hers."

"Yeah?"

"Also the park in Sottunga. The Flüüvin Park in Brändö and the Grand Flüüvin Festival Playground. She built all of those. She never keeps the money. She gives the money away. Mostly to the Flüüvin Pediatric Disease Foundation."

Starlitz pulled off his shades and wiped his forehead. "You wouldn't know exactly which pediatric diseases in particular have caught her fancy, right?"

"I never understood such behavior," said Aino. "Really, it must be a mental illness. A childless spinster from the unjust social order... Denied any healthy sex life or outlets.... Living as a hermit with all her silly books and paintings all these years... No wonder she's gone mad."

"Okay, we're going back," Starlitz said. "I've had it."

RAF AND STARLITZ were outside in the woods, slapping at the big slow-moving Scandinavian mosquitoes. "I thought we had an understanding," Raf said, over a muffled chorus of bestial howls from the sauna. "I told you not to bring her back here."

"She's your lieutenant, Raf. You straighten her out."

"You could have been more tactful. Invent some little deception."

"I didn't wanna get dumped off the boat." Starlitz scratched his bitten neck. "I face a very serious kink in my negotiations, man. My target decamped big-time and I got a very limited market window. This is Japanese pop culture we're talking here. The Japanese run product cycles in hyperdrive. They can burn out a consumer vogue in four weeks flat. There's nobody saying that Froofies will move long-term product like Smurfs or Seuss."

"I understand your financial difficulties with your Tokyo backers. If you can just be patient. We can take steps. We'll innovate. If necessary the Republic of the Ålands will nationalize literary production."

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"Man, the point of this thing is to sue the guys in Japan who are *already ripping her off*. We gotta have something on paper that looks strong enough to stand up and bark in the courts in The Hague. You gonna strong-arm people anywhere over vaporous crap like intellectual property, it's gotta look heavy-duty, or they don't back off."

"Now you're frightening me," Raf said. "You should take a little time in the sauna. Relax. They're running videos."

"Videos right in all that goddamn steam, Raf?"

Raf nodded. "These are some very special videos."

"I fuckin' hate videos, man."

"They're Bosnian videos."

"Really?"

"Not easy to obtain. They're from the camps."

"You're showing those mercs atrocity videos?"

Raf spread his arms. "Welcome to 21st Century Europe!" he shouted at the empty shoreline. "Brand-new European apartheid regimes! Where gangs of war criminals abduct and systematically rape women from other ethnic groups. While the studio lights blaze and the minicams roll!"

"I'd heard those rumors," Starlitz said slowly. "Pretty hard to believe them though."

"You go inside that sauna, and you'll believe those videos. It's quite incredible, but it's all quite real. You might not enjoy them very much, but you need to see this video documentation. You must come to terms with these practices in order to understand modern political developments. It's video that is like raw meat."

"Must be faked, man."

Raf shook his head. "Europeans always say that. They always ignore the rumors. They always discover the atrocities when it is five years too late. Then they act very shocked and concerned. Those videos exist, my friend. I've got them. And I've got more than that. I've got some of the women."

"You're kidding."

"I *bought* the women. I bartered them for a pair of Stinger missiles. Fifteen Bosnian abductees. I had them shipped up here in sealed cargo trucks. I went to a lot of trouble."

"White slavery, man?"

"I'm not particular about color. It wasn't me who enslaved them. I'm the man who saved their lives. There were many other girls who were more

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stubborn or, who knows, probably less pretty. They're all dead in a ditch with bullets in the backs of their heads. These women are survivors. I wish I had more than fifteen of them, but I'm only getting started." Raf smiled. "Fifteen human souls! I rescued fifteen people! Do you know that's more people than I've ever personally killed?"

"What are you going to do with these women?"

"They'll entertain my loyal troops, first of all. I needed them for that, which gave me the idea. I admit this: it's very hard work in the sex-labor industry. But under my care, at least they won't be shot afterwards."

Raf strolled along the rocky shoreline to the edge of the resort's dock. It was a nice dock, well-outfitted. The fiberglass speed launch was tied up to one rubber-padded edge of it, but the dock could have handled a minor cruise ship.

"Those women will be grateful. Here, we will admit they exist! They haven't even had *identities*. And this world is full of people like them. After ten years of civil war, they sell slaves openly now in the Sudan. Kurds are gassed like vermin by Iraqis and shot out of hand by Turks. The Sinhalese are killing Tamils. We can't forget East Timor. All over the planet, groups of little people are quietly vanishing. You can find them cowering, hiding, all around the world, without papers, without legal identities.... The world's truly stateless people. My kind of people. But these are rich little islands — where there is room for thousands of them."

"This is a serious new wrinkle to the scheme, man. Did you clear it with Petersburg?"

"This development does not require debate," Raf said loftily. "It is a moral decision. People should not be killed in pogroms, by brutes who hate them merely because they are different. As a revolutionary idealist, I refuse to stomach such atrocities. These oppressed people need a great leader. A visionary. A savior. Me."

"Kind of a personality-cult thing, then."

Raf shook his long-haired head in sorrow. "Oh you'd prefer them all quietly dead, I suppose! Like everyone else in the modern world who never lifts a hand to help them!"

"What if the locals complain?"

"I'll make the aliens into citizens. I'll have them out-vote all the locals. A warlord, justly voted into power by the will of the majority — wouldn't that be lovely? I'll raise a postmodern Statue of Liberty for the world's huddled masses. Not like that pious faker in New York Harbor. Refugees aren't

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vermin, even if the rich despise them. They're displaced human beings without a place to rally. Let them rally here with me! By the time I leave power — years from now, when I'm old and gray — they'll be accomplishing great works in these little islands."

The hookers arrived on a fishing trawler. They looked very much like normal hookers from the world's fastest-growing hooker economy, Russia. They might have been women from the Baltic States. They looked like Slavic women at any rate. When they climbed from the trawler they looked rather seasick, but they seemed resolved. Not panicked, not aghast, not crushed by terror. Just like a group of fifteen more-or-less-young women, in microskirts and spandex, about to go through the hard work of having sex with strangers.

Starlitz was unsurprised to find Khoklov shepherding the hookers. Khoklov was accompanied by two brand-new bodyguards. The number of people aware of Raf's location was necessarily kept small.

"I hate working as a pimp," Khoklov groaned. He had been drinking on the boat. "At times like these, I truly know I've become a criminal."

"Raf says these girls are Bosnian slave labor. What's the scoop?"

Khoklov started in surprise. "What do you mean? What do you take me for? These girls are Estonian hookers. I brought them over from Tallin myself."

Lekhi watched carefully as the bodyguards shepherded their charges toward the whooping brutes inside the sauna. "That sure sounds like Serbo-Croatian those girls are talking, ace."

"Nonsense. That's Estonian. Don't pretend you can understand Estonian. Nobody understands that Finno-Ugric jabber."

"Raf told me these women are Bosnians. Says he bought them and he's going to keep them. Why would he say that?"

"Raf was joking with you."

"What do you mean, 'joking?' He says they're victims from a rapists' gulag! There's nothing funny about that! There just isn't any way to make that funny."

Khoklov gazed at Starlitz in mournful astonishment. "Lekhi, why do you want gulags to be 'funny'? Gulags aren't funny. Pogroms aren't funny. War is not funny. Rape is never funny. Human life is very hard, you see. Men and women truly suffer in this world."

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"I know that, man."

Khoklov looked him over, then slowly shook his head. "No, Lekhi, you *don't* know that. You just don't know it the way that a Russian knows it."

Starlitz considered this. It seemed inescapably true. "Did you *ask* those girls if they were from Bosnia?"

"Why would I ask them that? You know the official Kremlin line on the Yugoslav conflict. Yeltsin says that our fellow Orthodox Slavs are incapable of such crimes. Those rape-camp stories are alarmist libels spread by Catholic Croats and Bosnian Muslims. Relax, Lekhi. These women here today, they are all Estonian professionals. You can have my word on that."

"Raf just gave me his word in a form that was highly otherwise."

Khoklov looked him in the eye. "Lekhi, who do you believe: some hippie terrorist, or a seasoned KGB officer and member in good standing of the Russian mafia?"

Starlitz gazed down at the flower-strewn Åland turf. "Okay, Pulat Romanevich.... For a moment there, I was actually considering taking some kind of, you know, action.... Well, never mind. Lemme get to the point. Our bank deal is falling apart."

Khoklov was truly shocked. "What do you mean? You can't be serious. We're doing wonderfully. Petersburg loves us."

"I mean that the old lady can't be bought. She's just too far away to touch. The deal is dead meat, ace. I don't know just how the momentum died, but I can sure smell the decay. This situation is not sustainable, man. I think it's time you and me got the hell out of here."

"You couldn't get your merchandising deal? That's a pity, Lekhi. But never mind that. I'm sure we can find some other capitalization scheme that's just as quick and just as cheap. There's always dope and weapons."

"No, the whole set-up stinks. It was the video thing that tipped me off. Pulat, did I ever tell you about the fact that I, personally, never show up on video?"

"What's that, Lekhi?"

"At least, I didn't used to. Back in the eighties, if you pointed a video camera at me it would crack, or split, or the chip would blow. I just never registered on videotape."

Slowly, Khoklov removed a silver flask from within his suit jacket. He had a long contemplative glug, then shuddered violently. He focused his eyes

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on Starlitz with weary deliberation. "I beg your pardon. Would you repeat that, please?"

"It's that whole video thing, man. That's why I got into the online business in the first place. Originally, I was a very analog kind of guy. But the video surveillance was seriously getting me down. I couldn't even walk down to the corner store for a pack of cigs without setting off half a dozen goddamn videos. But then — I discovered online anonymity. Online encryption. Online pseudonymity. That really helped my personal situation. Now I had a way to stay underground, stay totally unknown, even when I was being observed and monitored twenty-four hours a day. I found a way that I could go on being myself."

"Lekhi, are you drunk?"

"Nyet. Pay attention, ace. I'm leveling with you here."

"Did Raf give you something to drink?"

"Sure. We had a coffee earlier."

"Lekhi, you're on drugs. Do you have a gun? Give it to me now."

"Raf gave all the guns to the Suomi kids. They're keeping the guns till the mercs sober up. Simple precaution."

"Maybe you're still jetlagged. It's hard to sleep properly when the sun never sets. You should go lie down."

"Look, ace, I'm not the kind of fucking wimp who doesn't know when he's on acid. Normal people's rules just don't apply to me, that's all. I'm not a normal guy. I'm Leggy Starlitz, I'm a very, very strange guy. That's why I tend to end up in situations like this." Starlitz ran his hand over his sweating scalp. "Lemme put it this way. You remember that mafia chick you were banging, back in Azerbaijan?"

Khoklov took a moment to access the memory. "You mean the charming and lovely Tamara Akhmedovna?"

"That's right. The wife of the Party Secretary. I leveled with Tamara in a situation like this. I told her straight-out that her little scene was coming apart. I couldn't tell her why, but I just knew it. At the time, she didn't believe me, either. Just like you're not believing me, now. You know where Tamara Akhmedovna is, right now? She's selling used cars in Los Angeles."

Khoklov had gone pale. "All right," he said. He whipped the cellular from an inner pocket of his jacket. "Don't tell me any more. I can see you have a bad feeling. Let me make some phone calls."

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"You want Tamara's phone number?"

"No. Don't go away. And don't do anything crazy. All I ask is — just let me make a few contacts." Khoklov began punching digits.

Starlitz walked by the sauna. Four slobbering, buck-naked drunks dashed out and staggered down the trail in front of him. Their pale sweating hides were covered with crumpled green birch leaves from Finnish sauna whisks. They plunged into the chilly sea with ecstatic grunts of ambiguous pain.

Somewhere inside, the New World Order comrades were singing Auld Lang Syne. The Russians were having a hard time finding the beat.

Raf was enjoying a snooze in the curvilinear Aalto barcalounger when Khoklov and Starlitz woke him.

"We've been betrayed," Khoklov announced.

"Oh?" said Raf. "Where? Who is the traitor?"

"Our superiors, unfortunately."

Raf considered this, rubbing his eyelids. "Why do you say that?"

"They liked our idea very much," Khoklov said. "So they stole it from us."

"Intellectual piracy, man," Starlitz said. "It's a bad scene."

"The Ålands deal is over," Khoklov said. "The Organizatsiya's Higher Circles have decided that we have too much initiative. They want much closer institutional control of such a wonderful idea. Our Finnish hacker kids have jumped ship and joined them. They re-routed all the Suns to Kaliningrad."

"What is Kaliningrad?" Raf said.

"It's this weird little leftover piece of Russia on the far side of all three independent Baltic nations," Starlitz said helpfully. "They say they're going to make Kaliningrad into a new Russian Hong Kong. The old Hong Kong is about to be metabolized by the Chinese, so the Mafia figures it's time for Russia to sprout one. They'll make this little Kaliningrad outpost into a Baltic duty-free zone cum European micro-buffer state. And they're paying our Finn hacker kids three times what we pay, plus air fare."

"The World Bank is helping them with development loans," Khoklov said. "The World Bank loves their Kaliningrad idea."

"Plus the European Union, man. Euros love duty-free zones."

"And the Finns too," Khoklov said. "That's the very worst of it. The Finns have bought us out. Russia used to owe every Finn two hundred dollars.

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Now, Russia owes every Finn one hundred and ninety dollars. In return for a rotten little fifty million dollar write-off, my bosses sold us all to the Finns. They told the Finns about our plans, and they sold us just as if we were some lousy division of leftover tanks. The Finnish Special Weapons and Tactics team is flying over here right now to annihilate us."

Raf's round and meaty face grew dark with fury. "So you've betrayed us, Khoklov?"

"It's my bosses who let us down," Khoklov said sturdily. "Essentially, I've been purged. They have cut me out of the Organizatsiya. They liked the idea much more than they like me. So I'm expendable. I'm dead meat."

Raf turned to Starlitz. "I'll have to shoot Pulat Romanevich for this. You realize that, I hope."

Starlitz raised his brows. "You got a gun, man?"

"Aino has the guns." Raf hopped up from his lounger and left.

Khoklov and Starlitz hastily followed him. "You're going to let him shoot me?" Khoklov said sidelong.

"Look man, the guy has kept us *his* end. He always delivered on time and within specs."

They found Aino alone in the basement. She had her elk rifle.

"Where's the arsenal?" Raf demanded.

"I had Matti and Jorma take all the weapons from this property. Your mercenaries are terrible beasts, Raf."

"Of course they're beasts," Raf said. "That's why they follow a Jackal. Lend me your rifle for a moment, my dear. I have to shoot this Russian."

Aino slammed a thumb-sized cartridge into the breech and stood up. "This is my favorite rifle. I don't give it to anyone."

"Shoot him yourself, then," Raf said, backing up half a step with a deft little hop. "His Mafia people have blown the Movement's program. They've betrayed us to the Finnish oppressors."

"Police are coming from the mainland," Starlitz told her. "It's over. Time to split, girl. Let's get out of here."

Aino ignored him. "I told you that Russians could never be trusted," she said to Raf. Her face was pale, but composed. "What did American mercenaries have to do with Finland? We could have done this easily, if you were not so ambitious."

"A man has to dream," Raf said. "Everybody needs a big dream."

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Aino centered her rifle on Khoklov's chest. "Should I shoot you?" she asked him, in halting Russian.

"I'm not a cop," Khoklov offered hopefully.

Aino thought about it. The rifle did not waver. "What will you do, if I don't shoot you?"

"I have no idea what I'll do," Khoklov said, surprised. "What do you plan to do, Raf?"

"Me?" said Raf. "Why, I could kill you with these hands alone." He held out his plump, dimpled hands in karate position.

"Lot of good that'll do you against a chopper full of angry Finnish SWAT team," Starlitz said.

Raf squared his shoulders. "I'd love to take a final armed stand on this territory! Battle those Finnish oppressors to the death! However, unfortunately, I have no arsenal."

"Run away, Raf," Aino said.

"What's that, my dear?" said Raf.

"Run, Raffi. Run for your life. I'll stay here with your stupid hookers, and your drunken, naked, mercenary losers, and when the cops come, I'm going to shoot some of them."

"That's not a smart survival move," Starlitz told her.

"Why should I run like you? Should I let my revolution collapse at the first push from the authorities, without even a token resistance? This is my sacred cause!"

"Look, you're one little girl," Starlitz said.

"So what? They're going to catch all your stupid whores, the men and the women, in a drunken stupor. The cops will put them all in handcuffs, just like that. But not me. I'll be fighting, I'll be shooting. Maybe they'll kill me. They're supposed to be good, these SWAT cops. Maybe they'll capture me alive. Then, I'll just have to live inside a little stone house. All by myself. For a long, long time. But I'm not afraid of that! I have my cause. I was right! I'm not afraid."

"You know," said Khoklov brightly, "if we took that speed launch we could be on the Danish coast in three hours."

Spray whipped their faces as the Ålands faded in the distance.

"I hope there aren't too many passport checks in Denmark," Khoklov said anxiously.

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"Passports aren't a problem," Raf said. "Not for me. Or for my friends."

"Where are you going?" Khoklov asked.

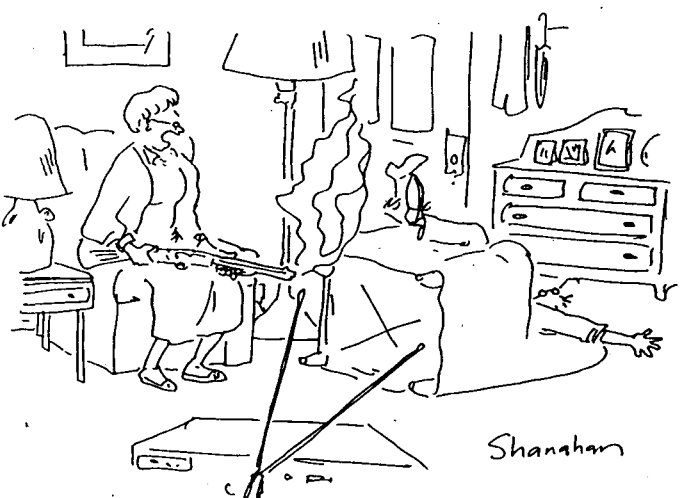
"Well," said Raf, "perhaps the Ålands offshore bank scheme was a little before its time. I'm a visionary, you know. I was always twenty years ahead of my time — but nowadays maybe I'm only twenty minutes." Raf sighed. "Such a wonderful girl, Aino! She reminded me so much of... well, there have been so many wonderful girls.... But I must sacrifice my habit of poetic dreaming! At this tragic juncture, we must regroup, we must be firmly realistic. Don't you agree, Khoklov? We should go to the one locale in Europe that guarantees a profit."

"The former Yugoslavia?" Khoklov said eagerly. "They say you can make a free phone call anywhere in the world from Belgrade. Using a currency that doesn't even exist any more!"

"Obvious potential there," said Raf. "Of course, it requires operators who can land on their feet. Men of action. Men on top of their profession."

"Bosnia-Herzegovina," Khoklov breathed, turning his reddened face to yet another tirelessly rising sun. "The new frontier! What do you think, Starlitz?"

"I think I'll just hang out a while," Starlitz said. He gripped his nose with thumb and forefinger. Suddenly, without another word, Starlitz tumbled backward from the boat into the dark Baltic water. In a few short moments he was lost from sight.



"Stephen King *understands women!*"

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Books To Look For

CHARLES DE LINT

Lost in Translation, by Margaret Ball, Baen, 1995, 279pp, $5.99, Mass market

MARGARET Ball's latest fantasy starts out with a wonderful concept, a crossed-wires plot reminiscent of classic comedies such as *His Girl Friday* and the like where the characters each have their own idea as to what they're talking about and they're each only half right.

On the first page, we meet a young Californian college student named Allie, hot in the middle of an argument with her father. She's obviously rather spoiled; he's decided to pull her from her college in California and has already enrolled her in a French university. The next thing you know, she's on a plane for France and landing in Orly where she's supposed to change planes.

All would be well (though there wouldn't be much of a story) except in another world, close to ours, a mage is working a spell to bring over a soul from the Elder World (that's us) to his. His spell combines with some music Allie is listening to on her Walkman and the next thing we (the readers) know, she's crossed over and landed in another world, close to Coindra, the local College of Magical Arts. Of course she's not aware of any of this and that's where the fun begins. Allie's convinced she's in Europe and simply thinks the air's cleaner, they don't have cars and computers and stereos because...well, it's Europe, and they probably don't have them everywhere — and certainly not in this backwater university her father's sent her to.

A group of students she meets think she's a new student and helpfully find her lodgings in their own rooming house and assist her in arranging her schedule. So everything seems fine, except the mage who brought her over is also the Dean of the college, he's the arch enemy of one of her new friends, and he has a nasty fate in mind for Allie.

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The "fish out of water" scenario — the interplay of misconceptions on the sides of both Allie and her new friends — is what makes the book so enjoyable. The rest of the plot, unfortunately, isn't quite so memorable and drifts rapidly into the usual sort of high fantasy story we've come to expect. But Ball's prose keeps the story moving at a breezy pace and she's got a knack for dialogue and characterization — at least when the scenes aren't centered around the Dean and his nasty cohorts. It's the sort of book that keeps one easily diverted waiting around in airports or on the plane (which, I'll admit, is where I read it) and if it isn't a Big Think sort of a book, for the most part, it's a lot of fun.

An Exaltation of Larks, by Robert Reed, Tor Books, 1995, 288pp, $21.95, Hardcover

It's winter in the early 1970s, the setting is Warner College, near Hanover, and Jesse Aylesworth, editor of the college newspaper, needs to get into town to pick up this week's edition of *The Warner Chronicle*. But there's a blizzard and his Mustang won't start which makes his running into Sully Faulkner fortuitous since she has both a working car and is willing to brave the weather to help him pick up the papers and deliver them around the campus. They get the job done and the next you know they're becoming physically intimate in the *Chronicle*'s offices.

All well and fine so far but, from the pair of very odd opening pages depicting some turtles at the end of the universe, we know that *An Exaltation of Larks* isn't going to simply be a portrayal of college life in the early seventies. The novel certainly deals with those times, and does a fine job of bringing both it and its inhabitants to life, but Reed's novel is also a fairly complex story of a war waged for the control of time and the ultimate prize: the moment of creation, the template on which can be written what the world and its history will come to be.

Frankly, I didn't find the latter plot nearly as intriguing as the story of Jesse, Sully and the goings on at the college: the scandal of Dean Lloyd's embezzling college funds, Jesse's relationships with others on the campus and his maturation process from being a fairly self-centered womanizer to someone who will consider other people's feelings. There's more than enough story for a longer novel with just that. And when you add in the color of odd happenstances — a talking catfish, strangely sentient flocks of birds and the like — it makes

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for a rich tapestry, deepened by Reed's insights into the human psyche.

I wanted to, but I couldn't buy into the rest of it: these immortal turtles from the end of time and their attempt to create the perfect world. Somehow I just wasn't convinced by the explanation of what it was all about, the who and the why of it, for all that I was enjoying everything else in the book. It's somewhat of a moot point for the first half or so of the book, but as the real world and turtle plots become more entwined, there's simply no getting away from it and I found my interest waning every time the turtles came on stage.

And that's too bad, because — for this reader at least — it marred an otherwise fascinating and perceptive novel.

The Jericho Iteration, by Allen Steele, Ace Books, 1995, 279pp, $5.50, Mass market

The appeal of disaster novels, including ones such as this which deal with the aftermath of a disaster, is rooted in the same area of our brains that has us slow down at traffic accidents, an impulse that's part morbid curiosity, part relief it didn't happen to us. The success of such books isn't really based so much on how gruesome the details are, however, but on how plausible the disaster is and how well the author brings it to life, particularly in its effects on ordinary folks.

Judged by such criteria, Allen Steele's latest is a resounding success, especially when he adds in the paranoia of a governmental relief force — sent in to help restore order to St. Louis after a disastrous earthquake: the Emergency Relief Agency, known to the unfortunate citizens of St. Louis simply as the ERA, a military-based agency with a private agenda that doesn't include the well-being of the citizens under its jurisdiction. For some reason we want to believe in this sort of a conspiracy, and what could be more horrific than having the very people supposedly here to help us in our time of need turn out to be the villains?

Our viewpoint character into this near-future scenario is Gerry Rosen, a reporter for a small alternative press who gets caught up in the conspiracy, first by simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time and finding out more than he was supposed to know, and then by having his best friend killed by an assassin who might well be an agent of the ERA. Before Rosen knows it, he's on the run from the local police and the ERA, with little hope of surviving, never mind tracking down his friend's killer.

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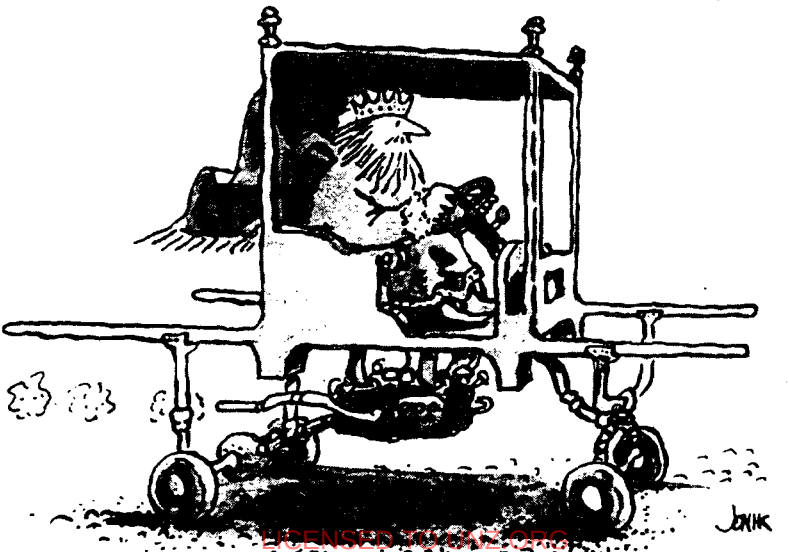
If *The Jericho Iteration* was simply a thriller, I'd have a bone or two to pick with it. Too often it ignores the "ticking clock" template necessary for this style of writing (by which I mean, that underpinning element where the characters have to do a certain something within a certain period of time or it's game over). But Steele has more to offer than that. An important theme of the novel is the exploration of societal mores and their breakdown in the aftermath of such a major catastrophe — so Steele needs the odd break from the page-turning intensity of a thriller to explore that properly. And it's also a science fiction novel.

Without giving too much away, at the heart of the novel are some fascinating speculations into future communications technology and a breakthrough in computer research that's not as far-fetched as one might wish it to be. The world we enter in *The Jericho Iteration* is close to our own, yet one step further up on the technological ladder, allowing us an insider's view of both the wonders and dangers that are always inherent in such advances.

In other words, Steele has produced a novel that manages to be a credible thriller while at the same time leaving the reader with much to mull over once the last page has been turned and the book is set aside.

Material to be considered for review in this column should be sent to Charles de Lint, P.O. Box 9480, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1G 3V2.



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Brief Reviews: Books

Rock of Ages, by Walter Jon Williams, Tor, 1995, 287pp, $21.95, Hardcover

THE LIFE OF an Allowed Burglar is a complex one, as Drake Maijstral, the Number One rated Allowed Burglar, is discovering during his first visit to Earth. On the one hand there is the glamor, the prestige and fame his escapades have gained him. On the other hand, the media and the police are paying him far too much attention. Neither one believes his claims that this trip is a vacation, not a working holiday. Just to complicate matters, beautiful and powerful women are showing a matrimonial interest in him. Then there are those pesky duels. What is a thief to do?

Rock of Ages is the third book in Walter Jon Williams's Drake Maijstral series. Fans of his first two Maijstral novels, *The Crown Jewels* and *House of Shards,* will no doubt be pleased with the master thief's return, and the uninitiated reader will have no problem entering this new universe where humor blends with the who-done-it plot to make for an enjoyable read.

The Godmother's Apprentice, by Elizabeth Ann Scarborough, Ace, 1995,292pp, $19.95, Hardcover

This book is a sequel to *The Godmother.* Does it stand alone? Pretty much, though it's a confusing read at first, not only because it starts with summarized backfill, but because the whole book is a jigsaw of puzzle pieces, each a different color and tone, and it takes a while to hook the pieces together.

The Godmother's Apprentice concerns the adventures of a number of people, many of them young, one of them learning to be a fairy godmother. The book is full of interesting tidbits about Ireland and magic and magical beings, some malevolent. The funeral for the King of Cats

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plays a part in the plot, and talking animals and visits to Fairyland also feature, along with e-mail and journal entries from the fourteen-year-old fairy godmother candidate, whose persona occasionally grates.

The puzzle does assemble itself, and it's fun to watch the picture form.

The Memory Cathedral, by Jack Dann, Bantam Books, 1995, 496pp, $22.95, Hardcover.

Subtitled "A Secret History of Leonardo da Vinci," Dann's new novel looks at Leonardo's life in Florence and speculates on a span of time missing from the official histories. Leonardo's mentor assigns him the young Niccolo Machiavelli as apprentice. The love of his life, Ginevra de' Benci, is suddenly promised to an older and richer man. His life is changed forever when he is anonymously accused of "sodomia." His reputation in Florence ruined, he travels to the East where he designs war machines for Caliph Kait Bey of Egypt and Syria. Here Leonardo's ideas for underwater warfare, flight, tanks, better cannons, and better bombs are all realized, and he must come to terms with the realities of battle. The book is a sweeping adventure, a love story, a careful historical speculation, and pretty much a complete success. Recommended.

Brightness Reef, by David Brin, Bantam Spectra, 1995, 515pp, $22.95, Hardcover

David Brin returns to his Uplift universe with the first book in a new trilogy. Once again, rather than painting a broad picture on the galaxy-spanning canvas he has created, he chooses to focus on one planet and the mutually alien races who inhabit it. The kicker this time is that all six races are there illegally. If they are discovered, their crime could spell disaster for all six homeworlds — so of course Brin makes sure they are discovered. But nothing is quite what it seems, and the revelation of plots and counter-plots propels the story right along to a —

Now for the bad news. This book does not stand alone. Brin apologizes for that in an afterword, but the apology doesn't quite make up for the disappointment of wading through a multiple viewpoint narrative from too many characters, points of view, one that's often self-indulgent enough to kick the reader out of the story (as where one character muses on whether to tell the next section in past or present tense), only to wind up marooned a third of the way through.

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Leslie What's short stories have appeared in Asimov's, F&SF, *and several regional publications. She has just finished a mainstream novel, and promises more short fiction soon.*

About "Uncle Gorby & the Baggage Ghost," she writes, "The search for self sometimes begins too late. My father's death made me feel as if the one resource I needed was locked away in a private library, closed until further notice. I sometimes wonder if ghosts aren't reference materials, accessed by memory, imagination, and wishful thinking. In any case, I believe in ghosts, and always look forward to hearing from them — especially when they bring me good story ideas."

Uncle Gorby and the Baggage Ghost

By Leslie What

KATYA HAD BEEN THINKING about the little boy next door since the day last week when she had learned he had been fathered by a turkey baster. This knowledge had left her unable to enjoy her vacation, spent birding in Death Valley.

She deplaned and walked through the airport concourse. The carpeting, a deep blue, looked more like sky than the sky. Katya stared past the floor-to-ceiling windows to the outside, where a commuter plane taxied in a shimmering haze of incomplete combustion. A plane circled and she watched, as if viewing a mirage from inside a glass of water. She imagined her goldfish, Vlad, saw the world this way: as liquid reality.

Vlad, with his tail rot and red-rimmed eyes, an unwelcome gift from Katya's ex-lover. The fish had managed to survive her benign neglect for over a year. Vlad was probably at that moment peering out his curved bowl, begging the little boy next door for a serving of fish flakes. The boy had volunteered to watch Vlad while Katya was away.

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She walked toward the baggage claim, but paused when she noticed several sets of imported Matryeshka dolls on the other side of the gift shop window. She slipped inside the shop to browse. One set of Matryeshkas, with Gorbachev on the outside, had been marked down by half. The newer sets featured Yeltsin, with a smaller Gorbachev nested inside his belly. Soon those sets would be marked down, Yeltsin moved inside instead of out.

Gorbachev had always reminded Katya of her father, who was born in Russia but had moved to the States in the fifties. She had not yet bought him a Father's Day present, yet here it was, already the November after. She might have forgotten entirely about Father's Day, if not for her obsession with the boy and his turkey baster father.

The boy, named Anther, had visited Katya in the morning of the day when she left for vacation. He had asked to play with the smallest Matryeshka in her collection.

She gave him the set of five nesting dolls.

"Wish I had my own one of these," he said, several times.

Katya, hearing the hint in his question, raised her voice, "Is that so," she said, annoyed. She really needed to pack, and did not want to pay him any more attention.

Anther, a small boy who had yet to grow into his adult ears and teeth, wore his dark hair short in front, with a rat's tail braided down the middle of his back. "We learned about Russia in school," he said.

The wooden dolls snuggled in his lap as he took them apart. The largest, about ten inches tall, was painted with a red peasant dress and a yellow and red flowered shawl. Inside that — a doll wearing painted purple and green. He worked the dolls apart quite gently until he found the baby, swathed in a painted yellow wrapper and no bigger than his little finger. With the baby nestled in his palm, Anther rocked his hand back and forth.

Katya heard a knock at the door: Anther's mother, Noni, who poked her head inside. "Hello," she called to Katya. To Anther she said, "It's time to go home." Noni wore her black hair spiked high, a section shaved out around the middle. Anther called the style "The Stature of Liberty."

Katya tried to help put away the dolls, but Anther shook his head and pushed her hand away. "No," he said, quite deliberately. "I'll do it myself."

So Katya invited Noni inside. Noni sat on the couch beside her son; Katya took the wooden rocker. Noni's confession began innocently enough.

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"Those are very nice," Noni said about the Matryeshkas.

"They remind me of my father. He was born in Russia."

"That's one thing about a turkey baster," Noni said with a quick glance toward Anther. "They don't remind you of anything, except maybe Thanksgiving." She laughed. "Course the good thing is, you don't need to remember your baster on Father's Day."

"What do you mean — turkey baster?"

"I like to joke it was medical grade," Noni said, and laughed. "Five donors contributed sperm. My partner at the time helped me mix their semen in a plastic bag. We sucked the semen into a turkey baster and my partner inseminated me. That's how I got Anther."

Katya stared at Anther, preoccupied as he worried the outer top-half of the doll into its counterpart. "Doesn't he wonder who his father is?" she asked.

"What's to wonder?" Noni said. "Anyway, we think of him as the donor, not the father."

Then Anther asked, "Think I could watch your fish while you're gone?" Katya's stomach twisted. She understood what it meant to practically grow up without a father.

"Feed him once a day, but not very much," she said.

"Oh I will. If you want, I could even change his water," Anther said.

The trip to Death Valley had been a bust. She had not met anyone interesting, and the thought that maybe men weren't necessary in the scheme of things had kept her awake several nights. Katya told herself now that she was right to have let the boy care for her fish. Anther would have been scarred for life had Vlad starved to death in her absence.

"We've had a lot of interest in those dolls," called out the woman from behind the gift shop counter. "Especially after Gorby bit the dust. Collector's item, you know."

"Really?" Katya asked, torn between wanting to keep the dolls or give them to her father. He had left Russia as a young man, abandoning his elderly mother to come to America.

Katya often wondered if there might be other relatives still living. Her father was quite secretive, and if there were relatives, he had never mentioned them. Katya didn't even know his real last name; he had been given another at Ellis Island. She had not seen him much since her parents divorced when

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she was only ten. Then five years ago her mother died, and her father remarried someone not much older than Katya.

She looked at her Gorbachev doll and stared into the painted eyes, the dimpled cheeks, the balding hair pattern shaped like a U from the back. The painted birthmark lay in exactly the same place on his forehead as the place where she remembered her father had a brown mole. She suddenly realized that Gorby was the spitting image of her father. The two men were related, as sure as there were little green apples and children conceived with kitchen tools. Uncle Gorby.

She paid for the doll and held the package cradled in the crook of her elbow. Then she heard a voice over the concourse loudspeaker, telling her to pick up a white courtesy phone. She found a phone on the rental-car counter near the baggage claim.

"Hello," Katya said, and gave her name.

"Your stepmother has been trying to reach you," said the operator. "She knew that your flight came in today. We asked that she call you directly, but she insisted that we tell you this."

"Sounds just like her," Katya said.

The operator spoke softly, and the noisy terminal made her voice sound as if it were wrapped in tissue paper.

Katya held the receiver close to her ear. "Speak up please!" Katya shouted. "I can't hear what you're saying."

"I have very bad news," said the operator. "I'm really sorry to be the one to tell you this."

"What is it?" asked Katya. People rushed past her to stand before the baggage claim. The carousel began to turn. Katya tapped her fingertips on the receiver. "I have to hurry, my luggage is coming. Please, speak up!"

And then the shouting, bare as a present given in a cardboard box. "Your father is dead," the operator said. "Dead," she shouted. "Do you hear me now?"

"That can't be," Katya said. She looked across the expanse of blue carpeting, and knew it was untrue. There, sure as sky, was her father. He turned his face away, but she clearly recognized his wide shoulders, his tan suede coat, the "U" at the back of his head. He hadn't aged a day since the last time she had seen him, two Christmases ago. "He's right there!" Katya cried as she hung up the phone.

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She ran forward and thrust her arms to part the row of people standing before her. Two lanky pre-teen boys blocked her view.

"Excuse me," she said in her most pleasant tone of voice. When neither one moved, she shoved her arms between their two T-shirts, now hunched together over one match.

"Guy," said one of the pre-teens, who managed to squeeze more than one syllable from the word. "Have a cow, why don't you?"

Her father had vanished, and not only that, her luggage was missing as well. The luggage was the only good thing to have come from her relationship with her boss, the ex-lover who had given her Vlad. He had won Vlad at the county fair on their only public date, the same night when he promised to leave his wife of twenty years. He had not kept his promise and had, in the end, abandoned Katya for a younger lover, a new hire in personnel.

Her clothes, her half-finished mystery, her birder's field guide, her camera bag, with ten rolls of exposed film she'd been meaning to develop — everything gone. She watched the empty carousel complete its cycle, then begin again. The area cleared, and Katya stood staring at the carpet, swimming alone in a deep blue nylon sea.

She hated airports, filled with people leaving without saying goodbye to one another. She traced the Matryeshka's outline through the paper sack, her fingers lingering on the crease where the parts fit together. At least now, there seemed no reason not to keep the doll.

Katya looked around her living room, somehow different than one week ago. Anther had piled her mail on the coffee table beside Vlad's bowl. Vlad picked up his pace and swam the circumference of the bowl, greeting her with the goldfish equivalent of tail-wagging. She looked through his glass to watch the red blink of the answering machine's reflection in the water. She sucked in her breath, then exhaled slowly as she sat on her couch and reached to press the button and listen to her calls.

The Singles Warm Line called to ask how she had enjoyed birding with their group. Could she come to a potluck in one week? Her secretary called to let her know the office was running smoothly. The next call was from her stepmother telling Katya what she already knew.

"Honey," her stepmother said, "I have very bad news. Call me when you get in," followed by another call that said, "Sweetheart, I don't know how to

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tell you this. Something terrible has happened." And the last call: "The funeral is today. You've never been there when he's needed you."

Her father dead? On top of that, the lost luggage, and now the horrible realization that the last thing she had to remember her father by were these calls from his widow. Katya played the messages back, then flipped off the machine to prevent the tape from being accidentally erased.

"Did you miss me?" she said to Vlad without emotion. She had not missed him. She unscrewed the fish flakes cap, but accidentally spilled in half the container. "Eat up," she said, beginning to feel hungry herself.

Katya unwrapped Gorbachev and set him on the coffee table. She heard a child's voice and looked out her living-room window, where she saw Anther, home from school. Soon she heard the familiar clatter as he set his bike on her stoop, then knocked on her door.

She hurried to answer with a chipper "Hello."

"Here," he said, thrusting a handful of snapdragons he had picked from the flowerpot on her stoop.

"Thank you," she said. "Would you like to come in for some ice cream?"

Anther walked inside. He was very clean, except for a little mud on the bottoms of his sneakers. She thought of asking him to remove his shoes, but clean carpeting no longer seemed to matter.

A question burned within her: "Don't you ever wonder about your father?" Instead, Katya asked, "Chocolate, or vanilla?"

"Vanilla," he said. His toothy grin made Katya feel guilty; she knew that Noni did not believe in feeding the boy sugar. Anther pointed to her new Matryeshka, and Katya nodded, meaning he could play with it. She walked into the kitchen and dished out ice cream topped with marshmallow sauce. She brought the bowls back to the living room. Anther sat in her rocking chair, she on her couch. "Excuse me one minute," she said. She dialed her father's number and let the phone ring until her stepmother answered on the tenth ring.

"So," Katya said. "What happened?"

"I suppose you heard by now your father died," her stepmother said. "Funeral was yesterday. Had a houseful of mourners, then. Not much to do about it now. If you lived close by you could take home some of this food before it goes to waste. I wish there was some way to ship it to you."

"I'm sorry," Katya said. "Do you want me to come?"

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"Well, it's a little late for that, don't you think?"

Katya stared at her ice cream. "Did he say anything...about me?"

"Now Katya, don't start this again. I didn't make a transcript, you know."

"How?" Katya asked. "How did he die?"

"Dropped dead of a heart attack," her stepmother said. "Ate himself to death."

Katya said good-bye.

"Aren't you going to eat your ice cream?" Anther said.

"No," she answered, and handed her bowl to him. She noticed Vlad had stopped swimming and lay belly up, his red eyes gone white. "Vlad is dead," she said, as if noting it for an official record.

Anther brought the spoon to his mouth. "That's too bad."

Katya took Vlad's bowl away to empty into the toilet. She flushed and watched him swirl in the tank, before spiraling downward into fish hell.

"Where's Vlad now?" asked Anther when she returned.

"He went for a little swim," she said.

"Oh," he said. "Maybe we should drive to the pet store and get another fish. I could pick one out."

"Maybe," she said. "Finish your ice cream first."

KATYA JOINED a support group for people who had sighted their relatives after death. In all there were twenty-five members. Their leader, a woman named Sunny, made her living as a clairvoyant who performed past-life regressions. She explained to Katya the five stages after death.

"Denial comes first," Sunny said. "Where you don't really believe someone is dead because the hospital wouldn't let you in to view the body, so you suspect they made a mistake."

It turned out that this had happened to one young man, who swore that the nurse had pronounced his mother dead. He found out hours later, when the doctor made his visit, that the nurse had been wrong. The shock of it all was what ended up killing his mother.

"The second stage," Sunny said, "is anger. Where you find yourself furious every time you see someone older or fatter than the relative you've lost."

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"It isn't fair," said the plump woman sitting beside Katya. "Why did my in-laws get to eat French Brie and live? And my poor husband, dead at only fifty-eight."

Bargaining, Sunny said, was probably the most embarrassing one to admit. "You plead with God to take your cheap uncle instead of your father, because your cheap uncle never bothered to send you a birthday gift, even though you'd sent presents to him and his wife, and their three children — now grown — for twenty years."

There was depression, the stage the support group told Katya they thought she was stuck in. Food was one cure for depression, or shopping, or time, or anti-depressant drugs.

"Don't worry about putting on weight," the woman who had lost her husband said. "It's better than taking up smoking."

"I'm not sure I agree with that," said the man whose mother had not really been dead. He pulled out a cigarette from his shirt pocket. "Smoking's not so bad," he said with a look toward the plump woman, "compared to other things."

Last of the five stages was acceptance, but there were no guarantees one could get to that one, despite having gone through all the others.

"But this didn't happen when my mother died," Katya said. "Why didn't I see her ghost?"

"Maybe she had nothing left to say to you," Sunny said.

After the meeting, Katya drove home and ate a bowl of ice cream while she listened to her stepmother's voice.

"Honey. I have very bad news. Call me when you get in." Katya listened to the tape, and after, could not get to sleep.

She saw her father's ghost the next day, when she took Anther to the "It's-A-Dollar" store in the mall. She found It's-A-Dollar a great place to shop whenever depression overwhelmed her and she needed retail therapy, but didn't have much cash.

She gave Anther a five and kept thirty dollars to spend on herself. That was enough to buy twenty-nine items, which the salesclerk packed into the large pink plastic tub Katya had picked to hold her purchases. Anther chose four plastic hockey sticks and a blue flowered tissue holder for his mom.

She led him toward the exit. They debated over whether to stop and buy

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a half-pound of bridge mix or spend the money on an Orange Julius, Anther's choice. Then she saw her father standing in front of Hickory Farms with his back to her, barely two hundred feet away. Her father had once told her how much he liked their beef-stick, which reminded him of the salami his family had cured back home in Russia. She remembered little of that conversation. "If I'd had a son," he had said, or something like it, "I'd have taught him the butcher trade."

"Hurry," Katya said, gripping Anther's arm. She pulled him roughly toward the tan coat, toward the 'U' of hair. She waited her turn behind shoppers clogging up space at the sampling counter. When she finally stood at the front, her father had vanished.

"You forgot to get a fish," Anther said as she led him toward the parking lot.

Anther spent Friday night. He and Katya had changed into their two-piece pajamas and were playing their third game of crazy eights when Katya asked, "Do you ever think about what your father was like?"

Anther laid his cards face-down on the coffee table and reached toward the plate of brownies they had baked right after dinner. "I don't have a father," he said.

He stuffed a whole brownie into his mouth and the crumbs dribbled down his shirt and onto her carpeting. As Katya watched the boy eat, she felt something gnaw at her stomach.

"Everyone has a father," she said, her voice tight and high.

"You don't," he said. He grabbed at the plate.

"But I do," Katya said. "I do have a father. I've seen him," she said.

Anther shrugged. "I believe you," he said. "Can I have some milk, please?"

"Yes," she said. "I'll get it."

She walked into the kitchen and looked at an old picture of her father which she had taped to the refrigerator. Katya touched the glossy paper and felt a chill course through her. She felt so very alone, almost as if she were an incomplete being, like a Matryeshka whose halves did not fit together.

She opened the refrigerator to pour Anther's milk. With the door open, the light's reflection formed a halo over her father's head. A lightness started in her chest, then floated downward toward her belly. It occurred to Katya

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that she ought to write to Uncle Gorby, ask if he remembered a brother — perhaps someone who left suddenly — someone the family no longer talked about. She wondered if her uncle had children of his own.

She brought out Anther's milk. "Excuse me for a minute," she said, then dialed her father's number.

"Hello," her stepmother said.

"Hi," Katya answered. "Could I ask you something? Where exactly in Russia did my father say he was born?"

"I don't know, honey. He never talked about that."

"But I heard him talk about Kiev once," Katya persisted. "When I forgot your wedding. Father said something like, 'If I had a son, he could learn a trade just like my father taught me back in Kiev.'"

"No," her stepmother said. "It wasn't quite like that, as I recall it, and I remember the day quite clearly. It was my wedding, you know."

"Well, what exactly did he say?" Katya asked.

Her stepmother hesitated. "Now do you really want to go over this again?" she said. "Honestly. I warned him he was being too harsh."

"Tell me," Katya said.

"Now honey. I hate dragging this out again. He said," she began, "that he wished he had never had a daughter."

"Oh," Katya said. "I guess that's right. Maybe you mentioned that once before."

"Water under the bridge," said her stepmother.

"Was he still angry with me when he died?"

"Of course he was angry. But you know deep down inside he really loved you."

"Yes," Katya said. But she didn't know, not really.

She had Anther brush his teeth and she laid out his sleeping bag atop the sofa cushions. He clambered inside, smiling up at her as she smoothed down the pillow and turned off the light.

"Goo'night," he said, his voice tentative and small. She resisted an urge to lean over him and smother his forehead with tender kisses.

"Good night," she said, and walked to her room. She sat at her desk to begin her first letter to Uncle Gorby. Wouldn't that be something? she thought. Wouldn't Daddy be pleased if I found his brother? She put her pen to the paper, but her hand shook from cold, and she found it difficult to write.

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"Dear Uncle Gorby," she began at last. "It might come as a big surprise to learn you have family in the States. Perhaps you could come visit. There's something I want to talk to you about." She shivered and tucked the hem of her pajama top into the waistband to ward away the chill.

And then a voice floated above her, clear and real. "I am all right, my daughter," her father reassured her in his broken English.

"Daddy?" she asked. "Is that you?" Katya looked around her room, but saw nothing, except maybe the flicker of the floor lamp. She felt close to tears as she hunched over her desk, hugging herself.

The lamp crackled and the light sputtered off. Katya closed her eyes to the darkness of the room.

"Daughter," said her father. "Why are you doing this? I am gone and you cannot bring me back."

"How could you leave without telling me goodbye?" she whispered. "How will I know if you forgive me?"

"I will, if you forgive me," he whispered, and at once the cold lifted. She felt her father's countenance, noticed the slightly sour aroma of leather, the prickling feeling on her cheek like a kiss. She warmed inside an unconditional embrace as her father took her hand and led her toward her bed to sleep.

There was a weak knock on her bedroom door in the morning. Katya stirred as Anther asked, "Are there any brownies left?"

She opened her eyes and sat up quickly in bed. "I'll make you breakfast," she said. "Oatmeal, with bran added. Fresh fruit, whole wheat toast."

She heard him groan. "What time is my mom coming to get me?" he asked.

"Later," she said. "Aren't you hungry for something healthy? How about waffles? With real maple syrup?"

"Great," he said. "Health food, just like at home."

She followed him into the kitchen. He plopped into a chair and she walked past him to the cupboard. She heard a crunch and lifted up her foot to look. Anther had been playing with her Uncle Gorby doll and Gorby's head had rolled off the table and onto the floor.

She cried out, a high-pitched moan.

"It was an accident," Anther said, as he stooped to grab the broken head. The face was cracked down the middle, and the back of the head had broken off. Anther handed her the pieces. "I was *going* to put it away."

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She clutched Gorby's head; her breath quickening. "What have you done?" Katya screamed. "You little bastard!"

The boy looked up at her and his lips quivered in slow motion. His eyelids welled with tears, and he pulled up his shoulders as his body convulsed.

She cradled Gorby in her palm, tracing the cracks with her fingertips. Her dad, her lover, her luggage, her goldfish, Uncle Gorby — all gone. And now she was about to lose Anther.

She set the broken Matryeshka doll on the table and placed her arm across the boy's back. "I'm so sorry," Katya said, but he did not calm at her voice. "I didn't mean it. Please don't cry." She patted Anther's back and felt him start to relax. His breathing caught in a shudder, then returned to normal.

"It's okay, sweetie," she whispered. "I can glue the head like new, and then you can have the doll to keep."

He looked up at her, and smiled, halfheartedly. "Really?" he asked. "Do you promise?"

"Yes," Katya said. "I want you to have it."

His eyelashes were shiny. He hugged her tight around the waist and she felt his warm tears seep through her pajamas. "Wait till I tell my mom," he said.

"Your mom," Katya answered, having almost forgotten that he had one.

"You're my very best friend," he said.

She smoothed down his hair. "Your best friend," she said, disappointed. Yet even that was better than nothing.

"Did I ever tell you that I always wanted my own set of Matryeshka dolls?" Anther said.

"Yes," Katya answered. "You've told me that before."

He pulled away and moved to open the refrigerator door. "So, what do you want to do today?" Anther asked as he rummaged inside.

"I want to go shopping," Katya said. "I need to buy something."

"Like what?" Anther asked.

"I don't know. Maybe something for the singles potluck. I just need to shop. It doesn't really matter what I buy."

"I understand," Anther said. "My mom does that, too. But we could buy a fish. You do need another fish."

"Yes," Katya said. "You're right. That's exactly what I need." She brightened. She would find a smarter fish, maybe something tropical and pretty.

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She squeezed past him to the counter, where she heated up the waffle iron and started the batter. The fragrance of vanilla, freed by baking, filled the kitchen as she cooked the waffles to a light oak color. Katya gave Anther a small plate with one waffle, a tablespoon of syrup drizzled over the top. She kept the other waffle plain for herself.

"Can I have seconds?" Anther asked, before he had finished eating.

Then he helped her with the dishes, and after, ran ahead into the living room to straighten up.

She left him alone to change. "Get ready," she said. "I'll be there in a minute." She dressed and joined him at the front door. On her way out, she turned around, feeling as if she had forgotten something.

She walked back to the coffee table and cleared away enough room for a small aquarium.

"Katya?" he called from the stoop.

"Just a second," she said, and looked outside the front window. The day was clear and sunny. She took a step toward the door, then stopped and reached around to plug in her answering machine. It was ready now, in case anyone called, wanting to leave her a message while she was out.

Dedicated to the memory of Kent Patterson

"Do you do trunk enhancement?"

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Mike Resnick's story, "The Roosevelt Dispatches," is the first of the War of the Worlds *stories mentioned in the editorial. In Wells' novel, the Martians land in England. Wells deals with Europe, ever so slightly, but never examines what happens in the rest of the world.*

Mike, whose Roosevelt stories have become classics in the alternate history field, puts the Martians in contact with one of the last century's most enterprising men, a far-ranging intellect who never saw a puzzle he didn't want to solve. One Theodore Roosevelt, freedom fighter, big game hunter, and future President of the United States.

The Roosevelt Dispatches

By Mike Resnick

Excerpt from the Diary of Theodore Roosevelt (Volume 23):

July 9, 1898:

SHOT AND KILLED A MOST unusual beast this afternoon. Letters of inquiry go off tomorrow to the various museums to see which of them would like the mounted specimen once I have finished studying it.

Tropical rain continues unabated. Many of the men are down with influenza, and in the case of poor Westmore it looks like we shall lose him to pneumonia before the week is out. Still awaiting orders, now that San Juan Hill and the surrounding countryside is secured. It may well be that we should remain here until we know that the island is totally free from any more of the creatures that I shot this afternoon.

It's quite late. Just time for a two-mile run and a chapter of Jane Austen, and then off to bed.

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Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to F. C. Selous, July 12, 1898:

My Dear Selous:

I had a most remarkable experience in Cuba this week, one that I feel compelled to share with you. I had just led my Rough Riders in a victorious campaign in Cuba. We were still stationed there, awaiting orders to return home. With nothing better to do, I spent many happy hours bird-watching, and the event in question occurred late one afternoon when I was making my way through a riverine forest in search of the Long-billed Curlew.

Afternoon had just passed into twilight, and as I made my way through the dense vegetation I had the distinct feeling that I was no longer alone, that an entity at least as large as myself was lurking nearby. I couldn't imagine what it might be, for to the best of my knowledge the tapir and the jaguar do not inhabit the islands of the Caribbean.

I proceeded more cautiously, and in another twenty yards I came to a halt and found myself facing a *thing* the size of one of our American grizzlies. The only comparably sized animal within your experience would probably be the mountain gorilla, but this creature was at least thirty percent larger than the largest of the silverbacks.

The head was round, and was totally without a nose! The eyes were large, dark, and quite widely spread. The mouth was V-shaped and lipless, and drooled constantly.

It was brown — not the brown of an impala or a koodoo, but rather the slick moist brown of a sea-slug, its body glistening as if greased. The thing had no arms as such, but it did have a number of long, sinewy tentacles, each seemingly the thickness and strength of an elephant's trunk.

It took one look at me, made a sound that was half-growl and half-roar, and charged. I had no idea of its offensive capabilities, but I didn't like the look of those tentacles, so I quickly raised my Winchester to my shoulder and fired at almost point-blank range. I could hear the *smack!* of the bullet as it bounced off the trunk of the beast's body. The creature continued to approach me, and I hurled myself aside at the last instant, barely avoiding two of its outstretched tentacles.

I rolled as I hit the ground, and fired once more from a prone position, right into the open V of its mouth. This time there was a reaction, and a violent one. The thing hooted noisily and began tearing up pieces of the turf,

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all the while shaking its head vigorously. Within seconds it was literally uprooting large bushes and shredding them as if they were no more than mere tissue paper.

I waited until it was facing in my direction again and put a bullet into its left eye. Again, the reaction was startling: the creature began ripping apart nearby trees and screaming at such a pitch that all the nearby bird life fled in terror.

By that point I must confess that I was looking for some means of retreat, for I know of no animal that could take a rifle bullet in the mouth and another in the eye and still remain not just standing but aggressive and formidable. I trained my rifle on the brute and began backing away.

My movement seemed to have caught its attention, for suddenly it ceased its ravings and turned to face me. Then it began advancing slowly and purposefully — and a moment later it did something that no animal anywhere in the world has ever done: it produced a weapon.

The thing looked like a sword, but when the creature pointed it at me, a beam of light shot out of it, missing me only by inches, and instantly setting the bush beside me ablaze. I jumped in the opposite direction as it fired its sword of heat again, and again the forest combusted in a blinding conflagration.

I turned and raced back the way I had come. After perhaps sixty yards I chanced a look back, and saw that the creature was following me. However, despite its many physical attributes, speed was not to be counted among them. I used that to my advantage, putting enough distance between us so that it lost sight of me. I then jumped into the nearby river, making sure that no water should invade my rifle. Here, at least, I felt safe from the indirect effects of the creature's heat weapon.

It came down the path some forty seconds later. Rather than shooting it immediately, I let it walk by while I studied it, looking for vulnerable areas. The thing bore no body armor as such, not even the type of body plating that our mutual friend Corbett describes on the Indian rhino, yet its skin seemed impervious to bullets. Its body, which I now could see in its entirety, was almost perfectly spherical except for the head and tentacles, and there were no discernable weak or thin spots where head and tentacles joined the trunk.

Still, I couldn't let it continue along the path, because sooner or later it would come upon my men, who were totally unprepared for it. I looked for

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an earhole, could not find one, and with only the back of its head to shoot at felt that I could not do it any damage. So I stood up, waist deep in the water, and yelled at it. It turned toward me, and as it did so I put two more bullets into its left eye.

Its reaction was the same as before, but much shorter in duration. Then it regained control of itself, stared balefully at me through both eyes — the good one and the one that had taken three bullets — and began walking toward me, weapon in hand...and therein I thought I saw a way by which I might finally disable it.

I began walking backward in the water, and evidently the creature felt some doubt about the weapon's accuracy, because it entered the water and came after me. I stood motionless, my sights trained on the sword of heat. When the creature was perhaps thirty yards from me, it came to a halt and raised its weapon — and as it did so, I fired.

The sword of heat flew from the creature's hand, spraying its deadly light in all directions. Then it fell into the water, its muzzle — if that is the right word, and I very much suspect that it isn't — pointing at the creature. The water around it began boiling and hissing as steam rose, and the creature screeched once and sank beneath the surface of the river.

It took about five minutes before I felt safe in approaching it — after all, I had no idea how long it could hold its breath — but sure enough, as I had hoped, the beast was dead.

I have never before seen anything like it, and I will be stuffing and mounting this specimen for either the American Museum or the Smithsonian. I'll send you a copy of my notes, and hopefully a number of photographs taken at various stages of the post mortem examination and the mounting.

I realize that I was incredibly lucky to have survived. I don't know how many more such creatures exist here in the jungles of Cuba, but they are too malevolent to be allowed to survive and wreak their havoc on the innocent locals here. They must be eradicated, and I know of no hunter with whom I would rather share this expedition than yourself. I will put my gun and my men at your disposal, and hopefully we can rid the island of this most unlikely and lethal aberration.

Yours,
Roosevelt

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Letter to Carl Akeley, hunter and taxidermist, c/o The American Museum of Natural History, July 13, 1898:

Dear Carl:

Sorry to have missed you at the last annual banquet, but as you know, I've been preoccupied with matters here in Cuba.

Allow me to ask you a purely hypothetical question: could a life form exist that has no stomach or digestive tract? Let me further hypothesize that this life form ingests the blood of its prey — other living creatures — directly into its veins.

First, is it possible?

Second, could such a form of nourishment supply sufficient energy to power a body the size of, say, a grizzly bear?

I realize that you are a busy man, but while I cannot go into detail, I beg you to give these questions your most urgent attention.

Yours very truly,
Theodore Roosevelt

Letter to Dr. Joel A. Allen, Curator of Birds and Mammals, American Museum of Natural History, July 13, 1898:

Dear Joel:

I have a strange but, please believe me, very serious question for you.

Can a complex animal life form exist without gender? Could it possibly reproduce — don't laugh — by budding? Could a complex life form reproduce by splitting apart, as some of our single-celled animals do?

Please give me your answers soonest.

Yours very truly,
Theodore Roosevelt

Excerpts from monograph submitted by Theodore Roosevelt on July 14, 1898 for publication by the American Museum of Natural History:

...The epidermis is especially unique, not only in its thickness and pliability, but also in that there is no layer of subcutaneous fat, nor can I discern any likely source for the secretion of the oily liquid that covers the entire body surface of the creature.

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One of the more unusual features is the total absence of a stomach, intestine, or any other internal organ that could be used for digestion. My own conclusion, which I hasten to add is not based on observation, is that nourishment is ingested directly into the bloodstream from the blood of other animals.

The V-shaped mouth was most puzzling, for what use can a mouth be to a life form that has no need of eating? But as I continued examining the creature, I concluded that I was guilty of a false assumption, based on the placement of the "mouth". The V-shaped opening is not a mouth at all, but rather a breathing orifice, which I shall not call a nose simply because it is also the source of the creature's vocalizations, if I may so term the growls and shrieks that emanate from it...

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the eye is not the multi-faceted pupil, nor even the purple-and-brown cornea, which doubtless distorts its ability to see colors as we do, but rather the bird-like nictitating membrane, (or haw, as this inner eyelid is called in dogs) which protects it from harm. Notice that although it could not possibly have known the purpose or effects of my rifle, it nonetheless managed to lower it quickly enough to shield the eye from the main force of my bullet. Indeed, as is apparent from even a cursory examination of the haw, the healing process is so incredibly rapid that although I shot it three times in the left eye, the three wounds are barely discernable, even though the bullets passed entirely through the haw and buried themselves at the back of the eye.

I cannot believe that the creature's color can possibly be considered protective coloration...but then, I do not accept the concept of protective coloration to begin with. Consider the zebra: were it brown or black, it would be no easier to spot at, say, a quarter mile, than a wildebeest or topi or prong-horned deer — but because God saw fit to give it black and white stripes, it stands out at more than half a mile, giving notice of its presence to all predators, thereby negating the notion of protective coloration, for the zebra's stripes are, if anything, anti-protective, and yet it is one of the most successful animals in Africa. Thus, while the creature I shot is indeed difficult to pick out in what I assume to be its natural forest surroundings, I feel that it is brown by chance rather than design.

...Field conditions are rather primitive here, but I counted more than one hundred separate muscles in the largest of the tentacles, and must assume

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there are at least another two hundred that I was unable to discern. This is the only section of the body that seems crisscrossed with nerves, and it is conceivable that if the creature can be slowed by shock, a bullet placed in the cluster of nerves and blood vessels where the tentacle joins the trunk of the body will do the trick...

The brain was a surprise to me. It is actually three to four times larger and heavier, in proportion to the body, than a man's brain is in proportion to his body. This, plus the fact that the creature used a weapon (which, alas, was lost in the current of the river), leads me to the startling but inescapable conclusion that what we have here is a species of intelligence at least equal to, and probably greater than, our own.

Respectfully submitted on this 14th day of July, 1898, by
Theodore Roosevelt, Colonel
United States Armed Forces

Letter to Willis Maynard Crenshaw, of Winchester Rifles, July 14, 1898:

Dear Mr. Crenshaw:

Enclosed you will find a sample of skin from a newly discovered animal. The texture is such that it is much thicker than elephant or rhinoceros hide, though it in no way resembles the skin of either pachyderm.

However, I'm not asking you to analyze the skin, at least not scientifically. What I want you to do is come up with a rifle and a bullet that will penetrate the skin.

Just as importantly, I shall need stopping power. Assume the animal will weigh just under a ton, but has remarkable vitality. Given the terrain, I'll most likely be shooting from no more than twenty yards, so I probably won't have time for too many second shots. The first shot *must* bring it down from the force of the bullet, even if no vital organs are hit.

Please let me know when you have a prototype that I can test in the field, and please make no mention of this to anyone except the artisans who will be working on the project.

Thank you.

Yours very truly,
Theodore Roosevelt

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Private hand-delivered message from Theodore Roosevelt to President William McKinley, July 17, 1898:

Dear Mr. President:

Certain facts have come to my attention that make it imperative that you neither recall the Rough Riders from the Island of Cuba, nor disband them upon signing the Armistice with Spain.

There is something here, on this island, that is so evil, so powerful, so inimical to all men, that I do not believe I am exaggerating when I tell you that the entire human race is threatened by its very existence. I will make no attempt to describe it, for should said description fall into the wrong hands we could start a national panic if it is believed or become figures of public ridicule if it is not.

You will simply have to trust me that the threat is a very real one. Furthermore, I urge you not to recall *any* of our troops, for if my suspicions are correct we may need all of them and still more.

Col. Theodore Roosevelt
"The Rough Riders"

Letter to Secretary of War Russell A. Alger, July 20, 1898:

Dear Russell:

McKinley is a fool! I warned him of perhaps the greatest threat yet to the people of America, and indeed to the world, and he has treated it as a joke.

Listen to me: it is essential that you cancel the recall order immediately and let my Rough Riders remain in Cuba. Furthermore, I want the entire army on standby notice, and if you're wise you'll transfer at least half of our forces to Florida, for that seems the likeliest spot for the invasion to begin.

I will be coming to Washington to speak to McKinley personally and try to convince him of the danger facing us. Anything you can do to pave the way will be appreciated.

Regards,
Roosevelt

Speech delivered from the balcony above the Columbia Restaurant, Tampa, Florida, August 3, 1898:

My fellow Americans:

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It has lately come to your government's attention that there is a threat to the national security — indeed, to the security of the world — that currently lurks in the jungles of Cuba. I have seen it with my own eyes, and I assure you that no matter what you may hear in the days and weeks to come, the danger is real and cannot be underestimated.

Shortly after my Rough Riders took San Juan Hill, I encountered something in the nearby jungle so incredible that a description of it would only arouse your skepticism and your disbelief. It was a creature, quite probably intelligent, the like of which has never before been seen on this Earth. I am and always have been a vociferous Darwinian, but despite my knowledge of the biological sciences, I cannot begin to hazard a guess concerning how this creature evolved.

What I *can* tell you is that it has developed the ability to create weapons unlike any we have seen, and that it has no compunction about using them against human beings. It is an evil and malevolent life form, and it must be eradicated before it can turn its hatred loose against innocent Americans.

I was fortunate enough to kill the one I encountered in Cuba, but where there is one there will certainly be more. The United States government was originally dubious about the veracity of my claim, but I gather that recent information forwarded to the White House and the State Department from England, where more of these creatures have appeared, has finally convinced them that I was telling the truth.

Thus far none of the creatures has been discovered in the United States, but I say to you that it would be foolhardy to wait until they are found before coming up with an appropriate response. Americans have always been willing to make sacrifices and take up arms to defend their country, and this will be no exception. These creatures may have had their momentary successes against Cuban peasants and an unprepared Great Britain, but I tell you confidently they have no chance against an army of motivated Americans, driven by the indomitable American spirit and displaying the unshakable courage of all true Americans.

To us as a people it has been granted to lay the foundations of our national life on a new continent. We are the heirs of the ages, and yet we have had to pay few of the penalties which in old countries are exacted by the bygone hand of a dead civilization. We have not been obliged to fight for our existence against any alien challenge — until now. I believe we are up to the challenge, and I am convinced that you believe so too.

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I am leaving for Miami tomorrow, and from there I will be departing for Cuba two days later, to lead my men into battle against however many of these creatures exist in the dank rotting jungles of that tropical island. I urge every red-blooded able-bodied American among you to join me on this greatest of adventures.

Letter to Kermit, Theodore Junior, Archie and Quentin Roosevelt, August 5, 1898:

Dear Boys:

Tomorrow I embark on a great and exciting safari. I'm sure the details will be wired back to the newspapers on a daily basis, but I promise that when I return we'll sit around a campfire at Sagamore Hill and I'll tell you all the stories that the press never reported. Not only that, but I will bring back a trophy for each and every one of you.

School will be starting before I return. I expect each of you to go to class prepared for his lessons, and to apply your minds as vigorously as you apply your bodies to the games you play at home. Had I been slow of wit *or* of body I would not have survived my initial encounter with the creatures I shall be hunting in the coming days and weeks. Always remember that *balance* is the key in all things.

Love,
Father

Letter (# 1,317) to Edith Carow Roosevelt, August 5, 1898:

My Dearest Edith:

My ship leaves tomorrow morning, so it will perhaps be some weeks before I have the opportunity to write to you again.

Shortly I shall be off on the greatest hunt of my life. Give my love to the children. I wish the boys were just a little bit older, so that I could take them along on what promises to be the most exciting of endeavors.

I am still trying to rid myself of the cold I picked up when I plunged into that river in Cuba, but other than that I feel fit as a bull moose. It will take a lot more than a strange beast and a runny nose to bring a true American to his knees. The coming days should be just bully!

Your Theodore

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In an issue filled with terrorists, ghosts, and Martians, we need a bit of levity. Fortunately, we had this story by Ron Goulart on hand. "A Cure for Baldness," according to Ron, "explores the various aspects of growing older." Hmmm. Would that aging could be so interesting for everyone.

A Cure for Baldness

By Ron Goulart

IT WAS ABOUT A HALF HOUR after the second bomb scare that his real trouble got going. Roger Snow had hidden in a closet the second time the fifteen story Tandem Brothers Publishing Building on Park Avenue South was evacuated. Trooping out into the hot, glaring Manhattan street once a day was sufficient. The building never blew up anyway.

Roger had sneaked back into his office after five minutes or so, sat again at his drawing board and started working on thumbnail sketches for the latest paperback cover in the Lizardworld series.

"*Swordsmen of Lizardworld,*" he'd said aloud, allowing himself to sigh some. "Can you fall from grace if you never had any in the first place?"

After awhile he noticed that his hand kept sticking to the layout paper, which meant the air conditioning was on the fritz again. Sighing once more, he leaned back in his chair. The chair produced the usual resentful groaning.

Roger was a plump, moderately tall man in his middle forties and his hair was thinning. Well, actually he was going to be forty-seven next month and

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he was just a shade under five foot eight. He was at least thirty pounds overweight and there was extremely little of his brindle-colored hair left on his head at all.

"I'm starting to sound like a resumé when I describe myself," he reflected. "But you can't romance the fact that I'm going to seed. As a person, as an artist, and — "

"Just where's your damn loyalty, Rog?"

"I had it when I came in this — "

"Enough wiseass stuff. How do you explain this?"

While Roger had been woolgathering at his board, everybody in the Fiction Division of Tandem Brothers had returned. Lex Tandem himself was in the doorway of the small office, holding a partially crumpled fax message in his tanned hand.

"You have some words written in reverse across the front of your suit," mentioned Roger. "What does it say? 'Down with the Colonel! Tobacco means...' Can't make out the next word."

"Death," supplied Lex. "I got whacked with a placard. You'd think those halfwits would wait until the paint dried before they started marching around with the damn things."

"Another protest march in front of the building, huh?"

"Didn't you notice it? Over a hundred wild-eyed loons waving — "

"Wasn't paying attention."

"I tried to explain to this woman — large hefty critter, probably lifts weights — that the Colonel Lightfoot Tobacco Company sold its interest in Tandem over a month ago to Worldwide Pesticide. But she whapped me anyway."

"Protestors usually have a narrow view of — "

"I'm happy to say it sounded like the cops broke her arm when they tossed her in the wagon. So I got some gratification out of — "

"They the ones who planted the latest bomb?"

"No, no. Ordek Yumurta is claiming credit again."

"The Turkish terrorist group?"

"How many Ordek Yumurtas do you think there are? Yes, of course, stupid, the damn Turkish terrorists." Lex shook his handsome head. "They continue, apparently, to be ticked off because we published Dr. Uzon Boylu's book last month. It's a shame because that book — what the bloody hell is

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that?" He was pointing a tanned finger at a cover painting that leaned against the far wall.

"Cover for Dr. Suicide novel #46. *Slit Throats in Singapore.* Why?"

"It's godawful."

"Yep, which is exactly the style you said to use, commencing with #40."

"I thought I suggested wretched."

"It's that, too."

"I'm straying from the point."

"About Dr. Boylu, you mean?"

"No, not exactly. Although it is a fact that *Think Tall* has helped me one hell of a lot. And how many other publishers can say they actually get anything from any of the dimwit books they publish?"

"The correct answer is fourteen."

"What did I tell you about the wiseass stuff?"

"To stop."

"Exactly. Before I read Boylu's wonderful book I suffered from not being especially tall."

"You're short, Lex."

"No, five foot two is not technically short."

"It is, yeah. Besides, you're only four foot eleven."

"I was, but after reading Boylu's book and applying his teachings — well, I shot up to five two. Any dimbulb can see I look much taller."

"That's only because you've taken to walking funny."

"What do you mean?"

"You go around on tiptoe now and sort of stretch your neck."

"Sure, that's all part of the Boylu System. In order to *think* tall, you have to *stand* tall," explained the publisher. "But actually — I came here to talk about the new assignment I have for you."

"I've got sufficient assignments, what with recruiting artists for Dr. Suicide covers and Lizardworld and the new Lethal Injector series and — "

"This involves not art but travel." He took, on tiptoe, a step back and cocked his head to the right. "It'd be nice if you had more hair and less chins, but maybe Olive Bunce has different tastes than — "

"Whoa, no. Wait." He pushed back from his board. "I don't intend to go anywhere near Olive Bunce or — "

"On the contrary, Rog, you are. You're going out to California, in just

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three weeks," said the publisher. "Otherwise..." Shrugging, he glanced over his shoulder at the door.

"You can't fire me. I have tenure, not to mention — "

"Tenure is for academics. But, don't fret, if you can bring off this simple task, you're set for life."

"Any chore that remotely involves Olive Bunce cannot be classified as simple."

"Follow along with me as I explain things to you." His boss smoothed out the fax he'd been clutching. "For the past two years, lord only knows why, Olive Bunce has been the top mystery thriller writer in the nation. Her latest compilation of tripe, *Red Blood Reigns*, has been on the lamebrained *Times* best-seller list for untold eons. The paperback of her *Blood upon the Rose* is already #2 on the — "

"It jumped to #1 this past weekend. But, be that as it may, Lex, I won't be — "

"Let me make two very important points. Firstly, Olive Bunce's contract with Blitzkrieg Books is about to expire. She is now being courted by just about every major publisher."

"I hear Barson & Sons offered her $42,000,000 for her next three — "

"We can match any offer those nitwits make. In fact, we'll top anybody's offer," the publisher assured him as he came inching forward. "And we have an ace in the hole in you."

"Nope, not an ace. A Jack or a Queen, maybe a ten, but — "

"She loves you, doesn't she?"

"Loved. Years in the past. Maybe."

"I'm betting she still does. Those college romances are intense and never forgotten."

"We only dated for about one semester, Lex, and I'm sorry now I ever mentioned it to you. The thing is, we weren't exactly Scott and Zelda or — "

"But you slept with her, didn't you?"

"I don't feel like discussing my long ago sex life with you. I've been married for better than fifteen years and — "

"And damn lucky you are. If it wasn't for Natalie I wouldn't even have found out about this terrific opportunity for us to beat all the opposition."

"Natalie? What does my wife have to do with this?"

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"Natalie, bless her pretty blonde head, sent me this." He fluttered the fax.

"What is it?"

"It's the final notice from the Class of '68 Committee of the Bayshore College Alumni Association. If you don't send your money in by this Friday, Rog, you'll miss the 25th Reunion. It's being held at the palatial Hotel Fairview, nestled high in the Bayshore hills and overlooking beautiful San Francisco Bay."

"I'm not attending that. I've never been to a damn class reunion and I'm not starting now. I haven't even set foot in California for sixteen years."

"Note this line—'Keynote Speaker at the Reunion Banquet will be Olive Bunce.'"

"Noted."

"You're fortunate that your wife thinks more of the company than you do."

"Natalie really sent that to you?"

"The original came in today's mail and once Natalie spotted it, she knew what to do."

"She opened my personal mail and shared it with a stranger, huh?"

"It's an invitation, not anything confidential. And I'm far from being a stranger," countered the publisher. "Natalie happens to be aware that we're anxious to get Olive Bunce in our stable."

"Listen, Lex, I have absolutely no influence on Olive. We haven't even exchanged Christmas cards for over ten years at least."

"She's divorced."

"So?"

"Well, the loves of our youth are the deepest and truest."

"I know, that was the blurb on the jacket of *Sins of the Flesh*. Even so, I—"

"Here's something else I want you to think over, Rog. Either get ready for a trip out to California—or put all your crap in a cardboard box and vacate this office by sundown."

Roger took another look out his window. "Will you pay all my expenses for the reunion?" he asked finally.

"Within reason, sure."

He said, "Okay, I'll go. I can't, though, promise—"

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"I don't want promises, I want results." Tandem moved to the doorway. "And see if you can, somehow, improve your overall looks before you head West."

ROGER FINISHED his Saturday list, weekly errands Natalie assigned him, an hour earlier than he'd expected. When he realized that, he was driving his six-year-old Toyota through a rural section of Brimstone, Connecticut that he hadn't been in lately. It was ten minutes shy of three and the afternoon was warm and somewhat hazy.

On his left he passed an abandoned roadside produce stand, an empty field and then a freshly painted cottage. Attached to a post in front of the house was a rustic sign — *Samson Institute: We Can Grow Hair Anywhere.*

Roger slowed, then braked. He swung the car across the lane and onto the white gravel driveway. He parked in front of the cottage and sat for a moment in his car, rubbing at his nearly hairless head. "Guy's probably a quack," he murmured. "But I am going to need hair in California."

Sighing, he eased out into the humid afternoon. While still three paces from the bright red front door, he heard an enormous rumble of thunder. He was aware, too, of the crackling sizzle of lightning. But it all seemed to come from inside the Samson Institute.

Deciding this could be an emergency, he sprinted to the door. He ignored the brass horseshoe knocker and tried the handle.

The door opened and he stepped into a cluttered parlor. The smell of smoke was thick all around and there was also a sulfurous odor. Sprawled in the exact center of a large shaky pentagram that had been sketched on the bare hardwood floor in pale blue chalk was a suit of clothes. A brown tweedy suit of clothes, with a frayed blue shirt inside the coat and a mended black sock dangling out of one of the trouser legs.

A pair of rimless spectacles lay just outside the farthest point of the pentagram. Near the sock was steepled a thick book bound in pinkish leather.

Squatting, Roger read the title, "*The Compleat & Dreadful Magikal Writings of the Notorious Count Monstrodamus.* Not too catchy, even for a hardcover." Standing up, he glanced around. "Mr. Samson — are you about anywhere?"

"You know, he got the incantation just about right. But hey, in black

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magic — as in most things, come to think of it — *almost* doesn't win you the cigar."

Roger noticed now that someone was seated in a bentwood rocker in the far corner. The chair was ticking slowly back and forth, its high back hitting against a tall book case that was crammed not only with fat ancient books but with lolling stuffed toys, rusty miniature cars, dusty glass animals, clouded crystals and dirt-smeared chunks of rock.

"Mr. Samson?" Roger squinted, but still couldn't make out the figure in the chair. That section of the parlor seemed unusually shadowy.

The person in the chair chuckled. "No, nope. Samson is...well, he's elsewhere. He's, yeah, about as elsewhere as you can get. Sad in a way, you know. Here he summoned me up, but in futzing up that ancient spell — and granted, reciting Latin backward can be tricky — by futzing up that one word, he blew the whole deal." He chuckled again. "Maybe I can help *you*?"

"Well, unless you can grow hair, I don't think — "

"Hey, no problem. What kind of hair do you want? And what do you want to grow it on?"

"My head." He was about to pat his scalp, but he had a sudden feeling that he'd like to be outside of this cottage and inside his car once again. "That's all right, though. I can drop in sometime later on, when Mr. Samson is back." He began a few careful steps backward.

"Hard to tell, Mr. Snow, when he'll turn up again. Considering where Samson is, you know, if he ever does get back, he may, really, have lost all interest in hair."

"Okay, then I'll just — How come you know my name?"

"Simple trick. My name, by the way, is Ford Madox Ford."

"No, it's not. Ford Madox Ford was some kind of British novelist who had a book of his done on *Masterpiece Theater* once. He's dead."

"That's true. Actually Ford Madox Ford, is an assumed monicker. My real handle is..." A huge roaring sound, accompanied by a crimson gust of flame, came out of the shadows. "For occasions such as this, however, I prefer to use Ford."

Roger lowered himself down into a plump armchair. "Nice meeting you, Mr. Ford."

"So why do you want hair?"

"Oh, it's sort of complicated."

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"Hold it. I'll read your mind. Faster."

Nodding, Roger pointed at the sprawl of empty clothes with his shoe toe. "Was Samson inside those earlier?"

"Eh?"

"Samson of the Samson Institute. Was he wearing those up until — "

"Yep, you just missed the guy. Whoosh! Right out of his attire and off to elsewhere. They won't mind his being jaybird naked over there."

"He dabbled in magic?"

"Black magic, ancient sorcery, stuff like that."

"Was he using black magic and such to grow hair for people?"

"I'd guess, since his business wasn't going all that well, that he was hoping to get some supernatural help."

"You mentioned earlier that he'd summoned you. What exactly are — "

"A demon."

"Oh."

"Don't, though, get the notion that my abilities are limited to dull crap like growing hair. Nope, I happen to be a full service, all purpose demon," explained Ford Madox Ford. "I could, for example, guarantee that Olive Bunce signs with Tandem."

Roger frowned at the shadows. "You read about that in my mind, huh?"

"Right, nothing to it. Carny trick."

"And you say you could actually make sure that she — "

"Are we maybe talking a deal here, Rog?"

"Could you, and I don't mean to offend you, but could you call me Roger? Only that putz Lex Tandem calls me — "

"Roger. You got it."

"The thing that occurs to me, Mr. Ford, is — "

"You can just call me Ford."

"I'm wondering, Ford, if this is one of those setups where I have to sell you my soul to get what I want. Or where I end up going off to elsewhere for all eternity. If so, a new head of hair and a contract with Olive isn't worth — "

"Eternity's not all that long, but not to worry," said the demon amiably. "Let me explain, Roger , what I have in mind. Oh, but first perhaps I ought to decide on a persona."

"Meaning what?"

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"Right now I'm clouding your mind so you can't see me clearly," he explained. "Normally I look like a cross between a cocker spaniel and a Komodo dragon."

"Cockers can be cute."

"Not when blended with a huge lizard. Anyway, Roger, if we're going to have dealings, then eventually I'll need a human form. Lately I've been using an appealing mix of Mickey Rooney and Harlan Ellison, but maybe there's — "

"Before we go into what you're going to look like," cut in Roger, "I want more details about this deal you have in mind."

The chair ceased to rock. "I want twenty-five percent of your income."

"For the year?"

"Oh, no. For your entire lifetime."

"Twenty-five percent is kind of steep. Fifteen percent would be — "

"How many previous deals have you made with demons?"

"Well, none, but I've been publishing for most of my adult life and I know — "

"Twenty percent is as low as I go."

"That's still not exactly fair."

"Who said demons had to be fair?"

"Okay, twenty percent, then. But, and again I don't want to annoy you, Ford, but wouldn't it be easier for you to simply make money with sorcery? Turn lead into gold with a — "

"Have you ever seen that done? The old transmuting base metals dodge?"

"No, but it shouldn't be too difficult for you."

"It's a snap, but very dull. No fun at all," explained the demon. "Do we have a deal?"

"I'm assuming that I'll be making at least twenty percent more than I am now. Otherwise, going in with you will only mean — "

"Think about what befell friend Samson just for futzing up one word. It's not smart to rile supernatural forces, Roger."

Roger coughed. "Sorry. What about the hair?"

"You got it." A finger snapping sound came out of the shadows.

His scalp turned suddenly very warm, felt like it was going to sizzle soon. Tiny popping noises commenced all across the top of his head. Jumping up,

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Roger touched at his steaming scalp. There seemed to be hair up there. "Mirror around here anyplace?"

"In the john. Down the hall, second door on your left."

Excusing himself, Roger rushed down to the mirror. He gave a pleased laugh when he saw himself. His head was covered with hair the color and texture of the hair he'd started to lose way back in his twenties. "This is great, Ford," he called out. "Except you've got it parted on the wrong side. Could you fix that? Only if it's not too much trouble."

The demon didn't reply.

Back in the parlor Roger found that both the shadows and Ford Madox Ford were gone from the far side of the room.

"I'm still going to have to explain all this hair to Natalie," he said as he left the cottage.

He was 24,000 feet in the air when he next encountered the demon. Roger had a window seat in the jet, but he was frowning at the notebook open on his tray and paying no attention to the fields of clouds outside. He was making notes on what he intended to do once he hit the reunion.

"So what do you think?" inquired the middle-aged man who was sitting next to him.

"Beg pardon?"

"Do I make a convincing human?"

Swallowing, Roger dropped his pencil on the tray. "Ford?"

The man chuckled a familiar chuckle. "I based my looks on Gene Hackman this time — only younger. Do you like his movies?"

"You got the nose wrong."

"It's a Karl Malden nose. He was great in *On the Waterfront*."

"Speaking of appearances, I've been losing a lot of weight. Is that because of you?"

"Yep, all part of the service. We're getting you in fighting trim."

"Natalie's been worried. She accepted the hair finally, but she wanted me to see our doctor before taking off on this damn trip."

"She's not really worried."

"What do you mean?"

"The concern is feigned. Now, let's talk about — "

"Listen, I ought to know if my own wife is concerned about me or not."

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"Not important, sorry I brought it up."

"At least she sticks by me, she's there day after day. Whereas you I haven't seen for weeks. Not since we met at the Samson — "

"I have other clients, other interests," reminded the demon. "Sometime ask the missus where she goes on Thursday nights."

"She goes to the St. Norbert Vestry Committee Meetings."

Ford Madox Ford chuckled. "Okay, now here's what I have in mind for you when we arrive in — "

"What the hell are you hinting at? That Natalie is — "

"Nothing, not a darn thing. Just clowning around. You know how evil spirits are, always needling." He tapped the open notebook. "Mapping out your assault on Olive, I see."

"Who's my wife fooling around with?"

"I'll fix it so you lose another ten pounds and we'll get rid of those pouches under your eyes and the extra chin might as well — "

"You're supposed to know everything, aren't you? So you must know who it is that Natalie is — "

"She's a charming lady, pretty as a picture. That is my final comment on her."

Roger picked up the pencil, tapped at his chin with the eraser end. He stared out into the afternoon sky. "Okay, all right," he said finally. "We'll concentrate on business."

There were at least four hundred people at the reunion cocktail party in the Gold Rush Ballroom of the Hotel Fairview. Thus far something like fifty of them had come up to Roger, squinted at his name tag, done a take and said something along the lines of, "Damn, you look better now than you did then. What's your secret, Rog?"

"Black magic and sorcery," he'd reply, chuckling.

After awhile he dropped the chuckling. It reminded him of Ford Madox Ford.

The demon didn't seem to be in attendance, at least not in his Gene Hackman/Karl Malden mode. Even more unsettling was the fact that Olive Bunce wasn't present.

"Wig?" Someone dealt him a sudden poke in the back.

He took a surprised jump forward, then, slowly, turned. "Nate? Are you Nate Karnofsky?"

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"I am," admitted the lean, bald man as he held out his hand. "Is that your own hair?"

"More or less." He shook hands. "Nate. We used to be..."

"Buddies."

"Yeah, we were, but then..."

"We drifted apart. How are you doing? Did you become a painter?"

"In a way, I'm an art director for a publishing house."

"I went into real estate. I'm a millionaire."

"That's good."

His friend shrugged. "I'd rather be happy. And you?"

"What?"

"Are you happy? Are you rich? Does your wife cheat on you?"

"What made you ask that last one?"

"I've had three wives thus far, Rog, and every damn one of them — "

"Speaking of women, have you seen Olive Bunce?"

"I haven't, no. But I did encounter Creig Bashford. He was always threatening to deck you if you kept seeing Olive, wasn't he?"

"He did deck me. He committed several acts of violence back in college. I even lost part of a tooth."

"Young love," observed Nate. "Now, about the hair, how'd you — "

"Bashford's here?"

"Over by the bar. Huge as ever, though out of shape, and looking extremely nervous and distraught."

"I'd just as well avoid the guy."

"Transplant?"

"Hum?"

"Your hair, Rog. I've tried just about every — "

"You don't, trust me, want to do what I had to do to get this head of hair."

"Face lift, too, looks like."

"Nope, no."

"Then how do you manage to look — "

"Black magic and sorcery."

"C'mon, seriously."

"Actually, it's based on diet and exercise. I'll send you a couple books by Dr. Uzon Boylu once I get back home, Nate."

"You still living in Pennsylvania?"

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"We never lived in Pennsylvania. Connecticut. It's Connecticut." He was scanning the milling crowd of people again, hoping for a glimpse of Olive Bunce.

"Well, well, my my. It *is* Roger Snow, is it not?" A distinguished elderly gentleman put a friendly arm around his shoulders. "Will you excuse us, Mr. Karnofsky, if I spirit Roger off for a little private chat. He was one of my prize pupils back then."

"Not at all, Professor..."

"Terhune. Albert Payson Terhune." The professor tugged Roger into the surrounding crowd.

Roger frowned. "I never had a Professor Terhune," he said. "You must have me mixed up with — "

"Convincing, isn't it?"

"Ford?" He stopped still, almost causing a cruising waiter to walk into him.

"I thought you'd recognize the persona. It's Robert Donat."

"Who?"

"Robert Donat in *Good-bye, Mr. Chips.* A sentimental film classic. Don't you ever watch anything on — "

"From what I'm vaguely remembering of Robert Donat, he sure didn't have a nose like yours."

"I retained the Malden nose."

"We have a problem," Roger told the demon. "Olive is nowhere to be — "

"I know, yes. That's why I've come for you." Ford Madox Ford started him moving toward an exit. "We're going to have to rescue her."

Roger halted again. "Rescue?"

"I fear the lady has been kidnapped."

"Then it's a job for the police — or the FBI. Some outfit with lots of weapons."

"Ah, but should you manage to save Olive," the demon pointed out, getting him moving again, "consider how grateful she'll be. She'd sign with Tandem in a jiffy."

"Think so?"

"Foregone conclusion."

"Just how dangerous could it be?"

"Aw, only moderately."

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Roger found himself in a wide, purple-carpeted corridor. "Okay, I'll try it." Then he asked, "How come you know about this kidnapping?"

The demon answered, "I keep my ears open."

The abandoned studio-warehouse lay at the end of a rutted street down near the Bay in a rundown section of the town of Bayshore. Perched atop the sprawling building was a giant plastic folksinger, complete with acoustic guitar. His booted left foot was planted atop the *F* in the large metal Folknik Records sign.

"I had a bunch of Folknik LPs when I was in college," mentioned Roger, who was crouched in the thick brush that bordered the tumbledown wooden fence that had once protected the warehouse. "Yeah, Wayne Purebucket used to record on Folknik. I played his *Clean Air, Pure Water Talkin' Blues* all the — "

"Stow the nostalgia." Ford Madox Ford was scanning the nearby building with a pair of night binoculars. "They're at the back of the building."

"You can see them with those glasses?"

"I'm also using some low level psychic powers. There are just two goons guarding Olive. She's tied in Recording Studio A."

"That's probably where Wayne Purebucket once recorded."

"We'll make our move soon as Creig arrives. Nab the whole — "

"Creig? Are you talking about Creig Bashford?"

"The same. He's the mastermind, if you can call him that."

"But he had a tremendous crush on Olive."

"The lad has fallen on hard times. He plans to net $1,000,000 in ransom and then retire to Central America, leaving his debts and responsibilities behind," explained the demon. "Quite a few of your contemporaries, you know, feel they've arrived at an age when they ought to start planning their retirement."

"Olive will recognize him and tell the cops eventually."

"He'll be wearing a sack over his head and disguising his voice."

"Don't you think, Ford, that a phone call to some law enforcement agency would work as well as a raid by us," he said. "Then, after they disarm and incapacitate the gang, I can go strolling in and announce, 'Hi, I'm the concerned private citizen who blew the whistle on this plot.'"

"Here, use this." Ford Madox Ford thrust some sort of automatic weapon into his hands.

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"I've drawn stuff like this for the Dr. Suicide cover roughs, but I don't really know how to operate one."

"If the need arises, simply squeeze the trigger. I've rigged the gun so you can't screw up."

"I'm not particularly keen on shooting anybody."

"This is like diplomacy. Most of the time just rattling the weapons is sufficient."

"Suppose they decide to rattle *their* guns."

"We're going to have the element of surprise on our — hush, here comes Creig's car."

"Look at that, he's driving a Toyota that's two years older than mine. He really must be in bad financial shape."

The auto stopped in front of the boarded up warehouse.

After a moment Roger observed, "He's not getting out of the damned car."

"He's having trouble putting on his sack." The demon caught hold of Roger's arm. "Okay, there he is — let's go. We'll grab him before he reaches the door and use him to get ourselves safely inside."

"I suppose you're aware that this guy has a history of knocking me down?"

"You didn't have a gun in those days."

Everything worked out much better than Roger had anticipated. The kidnappers surrendered without a shot being fired and Creig Bashford didn't even try to take a single swing at him.

When the police were loading Bashford into the wagon, though, he started claiming loudly that he was only a pawn in this caper. He maintained that a man named Henry Seton Merriman had recruited him and planned the whole thing. "The man is a master crook," Bashford shouted. "Short guy, looks a lot like Mickey Rooney."

No trace of Merriman was ever found.

Roger never returned to Connecticut, never went back to work for Tandem. It turned out that Olive, who didn't look any different than she had back in college, wanted to start her own publishing firm. She hired Roger, at a salary several times larger than what he'd been earning, as her Art Director and Vice President.

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He moved into her new mansion near Carmel. His wife, Natalie, he learned, had run off with Lex Tandem the very day he had departed for California and the reunion.

A week before the new offices of Bunce Books were scheduled to open in San Francisco, Olive came out onto the vast mosaic tile patio of her villa.

"I hope you don't mind, Roger," she said, smiling. "I've gone ahead and hired a marvelous man to be our Advertising Director. He's had a heck of a lot of experience, in Manhattan and London."

He was reclining in a candy-striped deckchair, facing seaward. "Who is he?"

"His name is Brander Matthews," she answered. "Quite handsome, except for his nose."

"Nose?" Roger sat up.

"Yes, it's just like that actor's. What is his name?"

"Karl Malden?"

"Yes, that's the one." ☙

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Harlan Ellison is the second columnist who has provided us with a story this issue. Harlan, our film editor, has been composing a lot of short fiction lately, much of it for his comic book series. The series, produced by Dark Horse Comics, is called Harlan Ellison's Dream Corridor. *The issues are spectacular, the art stunning, and the stories... well, see for yourself.*

"Midnight at the Sunken Cathedral" inspired our cover, done by artist Barclay Shaw.

Midnight in the Sunken Cathedral

By Harlan Ellison

HE WALKED THE BOTTOM of the world and tried not to think about how his father had died. Half a mile from the ivory sand beach, off the east coast of Andros Island, two hundred feet below the surface of the Grand Bahama Banks. Trudging through the warm, cool, warm translucency of the North Atlantic at latitude 24'26" N, longitude 77'57"W. A quarter of a mile from the island — about twenty-five miles southwest of Nassau — well within the 1,500,000 square miles known as the Bermuda Triangle — the ledge suddenly tips out and goes from 80 feet, drops out of all earthly sight, all human conception, to 2000 feet, maybe 3000, maybe more. Miles, incomprehensible miles down, where the pressure of pounds per square inch is tens, perhaps hundreds of tons. Nothing we know can survive at such depths. It is called the Wall of Andros, and those depths are known as the Tongue of the Ocean. In specially constructed bathyspheres, and once in the International Hard Suit unit called a Newtsuit, the abyssal deep had been penetrated to the depth most commonly found in the international maritime atlas, 1382 meters;

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4533 feet; almost a mile straight down. They had seen only darkness below them; and the cataclysmic stress-creaking of tungsten steel and case-molded maxi-plastic had warned them to pry no deeper, to go back up, go back home where soft flesh things would not be reduced to a crimson smear.

Walking through gorgeous plant life and coral outcrops and the racing, darting animated movie of piscatorial chromatics, he pulled himself along in the ancient hardhat diving suit, grabbing a medusa handful of writhing tubers, clawing the long-handled sand-fork against a chunk of upthrust coral, stirring the silt bottom as little as possible, plodding ahead step by step toward the anomaly he had read on his sonar screen.

In the basement of the Bermuda Triangle, blue as the eye of the most perfect sapphire ever uncovered, 350 carats, the Star of Asia, he teetered ahead of his bubble-trail, angled forward at forty-five degrees, hauling his airhose and lifeline behind him like the great tail of a saurian.

And he tried not to think about the way his father had died.

His father—whom he had loved and admired more than he had ever been able to say, ever been able to tell the man — had been slammed to pulp between the upper and lower dies of a gigantic body-part hydraulic punch press in the old Poletown plant, the Dodge main plant, in Hamtramck, the East Side of Detroit, in 1952 when Dennis was less than a year old. George DeVore Lanfear had reached into the four foot high opening with his left hand when the cold-stamped steel front door stuck in the press. He reached in with a long piece of pry metal, as he had done a hundred times before, knowing that the press operator had set the safety buttons that would protect him. The press was on hold, the clutch was locked; he extended himself into that empty space between iron jaws, sixteen feet deep, twelve feet wide, until the upper half of his body right to the belt-line was under a metal roof, resting on a metal deck; and the master button die setter was an alcoholic who was half-wasted from the night before, and the clutch didn't hold, and the safety failed, and the press automatically repeated the operation, and the press smashed down with a roof pressure of one hundred tons, and infant Dennis Lanfear was without a father. Dead as table scraps, in the old Dodge Main on Joseph Campeau Avenue, on the East Side of Detroit, in 1952, before Dennis could tell him how much he loved and admired him. Which he came to understand, when he grew older, because of the stories his mother told him about his father, was a manifestation of his infinite, terrible loss.

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Dennis Lanfear had grown to manhood without ever having been given the moment to embrace his father, and tell him how dear his memory had become to him. Could never tell him, not when he was fourteen and went to see the building in which his father had died (and got bad directions and hitchhiked out to Ypsilanti, where he wound up at the soon-to-be-closed Willow Run plant that had helped win World War II); not when he was twenty-two and joined the U.S. Navy to honor the service in which George Lanfear had served during the battle of the Gulf of Leyte; not when he was thirty-five and got his top security clearance and was assigned as First Sonar Technician at the clandestine listening station and torpedo test site here at Andros, the secret base most line-item military agendas listed only as "U.S. Navy Autec Range."

Nor could he tell his father, more than forty years gone, that he had been picking up something bewildering on his screens for quite a while now.

He had no way of telling George Lanfear that something wild and weird and possibly wonderful — like the secret dream of his otherwise mundane life — was going on in that absolute nowhere called the Tongue of the Ocean. Something that could not be named, and certainly could not be brought to the attention of his superiors...because it made no sense.

So now he walked. Having invaded one of the old shipyards on Andros, having "liberated" some old unassisted "hardhat" diving dress from rusted lockers, having repaired it and made it sound (it was gear dated 1922), and having adapted the gear to accommodate a synthetic mixture called heliox, which mix of helium and oxygen would allow him to exceed the two hundred foot depth this kind of hardhat gear usually permitted, he was nearing the spot indicated on his sonar readings.

He walked the bottom of the world, tried not to think that one slip and he would topple over the edge of the Wall of Andros, sink into the Tongue of the Ocean, and long before his airhose and lifeline pulled taut, he would be crushed by pressures easily as great as those that had slapped his father into oblivion. He trudged, he tried to avoid thoughts, and he did not see the smooth shadow that undulated above him and behind him. But soon he would reach...

There!

There it was. But it made no sense. He stared through the thick faceplate glass of his helmet, and at first could not comprehend what he was seeing.

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Time passed as he stood there amid neon-colored swimmers, breathing heavily, trying to get his eyes to re-rack the size and meaning of what he was seeing.

Out there, perhaps twenty-five meters beyond the lip of the ridge, out there hanging over the abyss, was a gigantic waterfall. He ran the word through his mind once:

QED. It is a waterfall.

Perhaps a hundred feet above him, there was a dark, odd, faintly glowing opening in the underwater. It was enormous, a mouth of water that opened *into* water. As if a vacuum hole — the words were the best he could do — a vacuum hole had opened into this deep. And pouring down out of that aperture, into the bottomless deep of the Tongue of the Ocean, was a waterfall of rushing, plunging, foaming water, faintly crimson and solid as paving stones, cascading out and over and down like an otherworldly Niagara, here beneath the Atlantic, here in the Bermuda Triangle, here in front of Dennis Lanfear.

He was frozen in place, disbelieving, frightened, and unable to defend himself as the painted, serpentine creature that had been pacing him curled herself over and over around his airhose and his lifeline, snapping them, descending on him, grasping him in incredibly powerful, naked arms, and dove with him...

Over and over, off the ledge, into the bottomless darkness below the Wall of Andros, down and down, to five hundred feet where the pounds of pressure per square inch was over two hundred, and Lanfear found himself embraced with death, as he was dragged down and down, till the faint light of the ocean was extinguished, and so was his consciousness; and the last thing he saw as oblivion rushed in on him was the sweet, smiling, thousand-year-old face of the watcher in the abyss, the guardian of the portal, the mermaid who bore him to extinction.

Lanfear was dissolving in a world of red thunder.

It was dark, and cold, and he was held so tightly he could barely flex a muscle inside the diving suit.

> "...here was darkness...darkness complete; it was that sepulchral and terrible moment which follows midnight."
>
> VICTOR HUGO, *Les Misérables*

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He had never feared tight places, closed-in confinement. There were other terrors, small ones, left over from childhood — cinders in the eye, certain soft insects with too many legs — but not the dark clothes closet, not the chilly dark basement, not the cobwebby shadowland under the back porch. But this was the weight of the entire ocean. This was the dungeon at the bottom of the world. *Everything* was up there above him, as he was borne below in the gentle, unremitting arms of a snippet of mythology.

For the first time in his life, Dennis Lanfear felt the paralyzing fear of claustrophobia; no rapture, in this deep.

The sound of wind rushing down through a great tunnel, the faint background memory sound of a great assembly line, the clank of metal on metal, the heartbeat regularity of machinery impacting on bendable steel. Dark and cold, like eternal midnight.

The sweet and gentle mermaid's face that had appeared for an instant in the Perspex, the fogging viewplate of his highly planished tinned copper diving helmet...and then was gone...as unlikely crimson water and sucking thunder took him through to the *other* side of unconsciousness.

A place that was always midnight.

Where the altar was closed for repairs, and the place of worship was boarded up. Watery, deep, high-ceilinged with misty vastness stretching up, up beyond sight. But always out of reach, and always at that terrible moment which follows midnight.

Dennis Lanfear was dissolving in a world of red thunder.

He was out, gone, blanked and insensible; but his flesh continued to listen in on the secret messages of the deep.

Instinctively, as his air-hose had been severed when she had wrenched him off the ledge of the Wall of Andros, he had knocked his head against the spindle of the regulating air outlet valve. The valve was usually made to be adjusted by hand but — like the Perspex faceplate that had replaced the original plate-glass built into the gun-metal frames when the "hardhat" diving suit was new in 1922 — someone had re-rigged the valve so the spindle was extended through to the inside of the helmet, fitted at its inner extremity with a small disc. Instinctively, he had knocked the disc with his head, trapping what air remained in the deep-sea dress. He could breathe. Oblivious, descending, bright with delirium, his listening molecules followed the passage of the story of his deep fall.

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In this aspect of the Bermuda Triangle the water was always Nassau warm. But as he spiraled deeper into the Tongue of the Ocean, pressed to the breasts of the woman-fish, it grew even warmer. Lying out in an August hammock warm. And the invitation of thunder grew louder. Perhaps hundreds of meters above them as they fell into infinite shadow, the great crimson waterfall roared as it spilled its raging body out of that impossible vacuum hole. But the thunder was not from the impossible avalanche of gallons above them. It came from below in the bottomless deep. Lanfear's listening DNA clocked every insinuation, every nuance. And then, when the fragile sack of blood that was his human body should have come unseamed and split, at a depth no surface creature could call home, he began to dissolve.

Dennis Lanfear, hands empty, mind clutching no more than muted memories of the crushed, dead father he had never been privileged to know, began to dissolve in a world of crimson water, a world of red thunder.

He had feared he would die as his father had died, in the jaws of unbearable pounds per square inch, but it was not to be. The self-fulfilling prophecy — will I outlive the years allotted to my father — he died at forty-four, will I live to be fifty — the unspoken fear that numbs all men — was eluded.

Dennis Lanfear did not crush under the heel of the deep, he merely dissolved. Molecule by molecule, atom by atom, submicroscopic electrical pulse by invisible swimming flux, he was carried down in the mermaid's arms toward the twin of the booming vacuum hole far above...a quiet yet susurrating void as black and empty of identity as the matrix of a thresher shark's eye. His every instant was culled, harvested, codified...and sucked into the vacuum hole as the guardian of the portal, the watcher of the Bermuda Triangle abyss, who had hauled such cargo uncounted times in her thousand-year existence, released his mortal flesh in its puny diving suit fabricated in 1922 in a city of a nation that had not existed for one-tenth her lifespan. She smiled, and swam away in the warm.

And the essence of Lanfear was carried away, into the dead emotionless vacuum eye of an abyss that lived, as the shark lives, only to feed.

The light that came to his skin from the end of the universe was white and pure and bright; but the water around him as he came to the surface of the great lake pool was a chromatic sibling of red and pink and amber that no

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eye on Earth had ever seen. It registered in that vast and desolate cerebral Sahara within the parietal lobe where nothing can grow. There, in the unfathomable desolation of the primary sensory cortex, whose functions are the Bermuda Triangle of the brain's potential, such hues and shades as composed the gently rippling waters as his throbbing head broke the surface, had meaning and identity. In that alien landscape of the mind, to which no human being had ever retained valid passport, the spectrum was wider, broader, deeper, and sang with a brighter resonance.

The copper diving helmet was gone. Dispensed with. Somewhere behind him in the passage through the thunderingly silent drain of the vacuum hole. Perhaps its atoms had been dispersed in a cloudy shower saturating the life-heavy waters off the Grand Bahama Banks. Perhaps they had been fired away in a narrow-focus stream, like a lightless laser beam, as he was disassembled, broken-down, deconstructed, unbuilt, as his molecules were being transported here — to this place of the lake pool and exquisite diamond-bright light and gently rippling water that seemed heavier than he remembered water to be, seemed able to hold him higher in its totality than he remembered water was able. It was not that he felt lighter, more buoyant, just that the water was more reliable, more fatherly, gentler. He trusted it more than when be had been —

— had been where? Had been in the water beyond Andros Island? Had been in the North Atlantic Ocean? Had been on the planet Earth? Had been in the year and the month and the day on the calendar in his office back at the Sonar station? Had been in his right mind, his right-brain mind? Where he had *been:* that much he knew. Where he was now, what had happened to bring him to this new place, by what impossible transport...he could not *begin* to fathom. The diving suit, too, was gone. Its atoms dispersed at the checkout counter of transmogrification. Stale-dated. Roundfiled. Recycled. Where the hell *am* I?

He looked across the crimson lake and saw ships.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands of ships. Boats, craft, vessels of all sizes and periods and origins. Arab dhows and Gallic currachs, Greek triremes and balsa-wood PT boats, Canton delta *lorcha* and lateen-sailed Portuguese trawlers. Whalers, warships, feluccas and frigates; hydrofoils, hagboats, pinnaces and Pechili junks. Siamese lug-sails, brigantines, galeasses, Hanseatic League cogs, sixty-oared papyrus galleys, Norse *drakkars* and dragon-prowed

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Viking longships called the Oseberg ship. Barques, yawls, packet boats, gigarettes, freighters, cabin cruisers, sampans, windjammers and luxury liners; Turkish tchektirme, Greek sacoleva, Venetian trabaccolo, Levantine caïque, and the German U-1065 pigboat alleged to have been sunk by R.A.F. Mosquitos in the Kattegat. Sailing ships that were little more than rough-hewn logs lashed into the shape of a raft with lianas, and twin-hulled catamarans of titanium and PVC pipe. The lake pool, harbor of last resort, Sargasso of lost ships, was filled with the oceangoing detritus of ten thousand years.

Yet it was hardly jammed. It seemed endless in its capacity to hold the castaways of the shipping lanes, but the lake was spacious and only dotted with a shape here, a bobbing four-masted brigantine there. Dennis Lanfear, treading water, turned slowly, looking and looking, amazed at the bizarre optical illusion made by a storehouse overflowing...that remained capacious and expectant.

He turned and turned...and saw the city.

It rose from the very edge of the lake pool. Slanting up as softly blue and gray as psalms ascending to Heaven, it was massive, enthralling, breathtaking in the complexity of its segmented faces. Walls so high they dizzyingly ran to a sky that could not be seen in the misty upper reaches. Walls that abutted at right angles—yet formed no central square. Walls that seemed ancient, yet downy with the breath of first birth. The cave dwellings of the Anasazi, the prehistorical hive dwellings of slope-browed pre-men, the filing cabinets for gothamites gone eternally condo...this was the City indeed, the City supreme. It towered over the harbor, and at first Lanfear saw no hint of human movement.

But as he stroked toward the quay, toward the low lip of polished blue-gray stone that would allow him to climb up to the walkway fronting the Great Walls, he saw one small figure, just one. No, there was a second person. Man or woman, be could not be sure...either of them.

He breast-stroked through the lovely crimson water, softly lapping at the stones of the quay, and paddled in to shelter. He pulled himself along till he reached something like a hemp cargo net hanging into the water, anchored out of sight on the walkway above. He pulled himself up, and stood, dripping heavy pink moisture, dwarfed by the immensity of the cyclopean walls that slanted away above him. He craned to see the sky, even to see a ceiling, but all was mist and the reborn antiquity of structures ageless and ever new.

He marveled that, if he were indeed somewhere beneath the Bermuda Triangle, in some impossible sub-oceanic world that could exist in defiance

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of the rigors of physics and plate tectonics and magma certainties, then this subterranean edifice was certainly the most colossal structure ever built on the planet. A holy sunken cathedral built by gods.

He stood there dripping pink, thick water, sanctifying himself in the first moment of true religion he had ever known.

And one of the two figures who had been walking beside the quay came toward him, and it was a man in his very late thirties or early forties, wearing a gray chambray shirt and casual chino slacks. He was a pleasant-looking man, and he walked toward Dennis Lanfear and, as he drew near, he smiled and said, "Dennis? Is that you, son?"

Dennis Lanfear came back from abstract visions of the City of God, the holy sunken cathedral, and looked at the man. Then he stared at the man. Then he *saw* the man.

Then he *knew* the man.

He had not seen his father since he had been ten months old. Now he was just over forty. He was older than the man in front of him, but he knew the face from his mother's photographs — the picnic at Crystal Beach, the wedding, the shot of him leaning against the Packard, the snapshot on the dock when he came back from the War. Dennis Lanfear stared into, and knew, the smile of his father dead four decades; the loving face of George DeVore Lanfear, come to beam upon, and pridefully acknowledge, the son he had never been allowed to see grow to manhood.

Dennis stood silent, the pain swelling up from his stomach to his chest and into his eyes. As his father embraced him, he began to cry. His father's arms went around him, the tough, corded arms that had worked so diligently until death in the auto assembly plant; and that strength bound Dennis as securely as had the arms of the mermaid who had brought him here, beyond midnight, to the sunken cathedral.

"Where are you? Who am I? What is this place?"

His father sat with him in one of the great rooms of the submerged city. They had eaten, they had talked endlessly, they had swapped stories of the past before Dennis had been born, and of the world since George DeVore Lanfear had died. They had caught up. They were father and son. And now was the moment of explanations, and of decisions about the future...because the journey was only half the destination.

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"Atlantis," his father said gently. "You're in Atlantis."

Dennis shook his head in pleasant, startled incredulity. "The legend?" he said. "The great sunken continent, Plato, Minoan Crete, all that...is that what you mean?"

"Welcome to Mars," his father said, grinning widely.

"You said Atlantis."

"Welcome to Atlantis."

"I, I don't seem to..."

"The Atlanteans went to Mars, son. You were brought here the way millions of others have been brought here, for thousands of years, because you got too near one of the drains. Our recycling system. Hadn't you noticed the red water?"

"I — I — " He stopped. He held his head comically, and waggled it back and forth. "I'm not up to this, dad. You've given me too much to — "

"All right, more slowly, then. The Atlanteans absolutely commanded time and space, just as the tall tales tell. They looked ahead, and they saw what was coming, what the human race was heading toward becoming, and they left. They went to Mars."

"But there's no life on Mars, we can see that from the probes we've sent. It's desolate, unlivable. Are you telling me that we're *under* Mars?"

"Exactly. But not the Mars that hangs in the night sky of Earth's telescopes. They, the ones who will build the ships, they'll never reach Mars. Whatever red planet in their sky that they land upon...whatever it's called...it will not be Mars. Command of time and space, remember? Come on, tell me you remember, don't fall behind."

Dennis laughed, a mild amusement. "I remember."

"Excellent. It's almost as if either one of us is smart enough to understand this. What it is, son, is that even if the human race reaches 'Mars' it won't be *this* place. To *some* Mars, perhaps; but never to *this* Mars, this Atlantis, to which we fled. In fairness, they left the legend. Just to tantalize. It was a debt they felt, a debt we still feel. An even break, if you get what I mean. If the world changes — it hasn't, has it? — "

Dennis sighed and shook his head.

"Ah. Well, then...if the world does change, and people change, and the legend draws them to us, we'll take them in. We took *you* in, didn't we?" Dennis smiled. "But not otherwise.

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"Otherwise...they'll have to shoulder their own destiny. If we could do it, why shouldn't they? We all come from the same egg."

He stared at his father, knowing all was not as it seemed.

The explanations were shimmering, insubstantial, missed a beat here and there.

His father looked at him with unbent affection, and said gently, "And I? Am I your father? Well, perhaps and perhaps not exactly. But I'll do. I am — really and truly — one of the many possible men your father would have become, had he been accorded the chance. I'm a good chance at your father."

"Am I dead?"

"Ah. *That* question. You ask it a little less quickly than most of the cargo she brings us. But...yes, *that* question again."

"Am I? Am I dead?"

"Not an important consideration. Probably not. But maybe you are. So what? Does it really matter a hoot in hell? Live, dead, you're in a warm place with wonderful things happening. We've got the opportunity denied us back where you came from, the opportunity to get to know each other. Isn't that something you've always wanted? Haven't you always cried in your heart that we never got to talk about everything that mattered?"

"Yes. But — "

His father spread his hands and gave him that spiffy smile. "Buts keep coming, Dennis. They never stop. And let me tell you a thing: even if you knew someone you loved, like your father, for instance, knew he was dying, and you sat by his bedside for six months before he passed on, and you said everything you'd ever wanted to say, tied off all the loose ends, made all the little wry observations, shared every experience you'd ever had, the both of you...and you got said every last thing there was to say, about love and family and how much you'd miss me...I promise you that the moment I'd closed my eyes and gone away, you'd think of something you left out, something desperate to be said, and you'd rue the moment for the rest of your life.

"But here, now, the two of us, father and son together at last, here on Mars, in Atlantis. We can talk as long as we wish. It's really fortuitous, Dennis. Or do you prefer Denny?"

And there, in the sunken cathedral, far away in another sky, beneath a broiling sun, under a crimson ocean, inside a triangle that opened onto misty reaches, father and son walked and talked together. As it had been ordained.

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As it had never been ordained. By chance. By choice. By design. Happenstance.

At last Dennis Lanfear had all the time he would ever need to realize his dearest wish: to share, amazingly, all the aspects of the father he had never known. *Never knowing this*: that at the final moment of George DeVore Lanfear's life, as death plunged toward him from above, his last fleeting thought was that he would never see his kid grow up, never know what sort of man he was to become.

By chance. By choice.

Somewhere in the North Atlantic, a body bobbed face-down in warm waters, but that body might not have once been Dennis Lanfear.

Nor was there, for any reason, a howl in the halls of hell, not even in the halls of the gods.

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In the months since D. William Shunn sold us this story, he has moved from his native Utah — first to Seattle, and then to New York City. He has just finished an sf novel titled The Revivalist, *and is working on a farcical, semi-autobiographical mainstream novel based on his lovelife, to be called* The Normal Guy.

He writes that "Celestial Mechanics" is dedicated to "my pals and former colleagues (two sets that actually intersect in places) at Folio Corporation, and to anyone who has ever worked on my car."

Celestial Mechanics

By D. William Shunn

NEUWIRTH RAPPED LOUDLY on the marble counter. "Hey, can we get a little service over here?" he called, unfurling his wings in what he hoped was a threatening manner.

A man in white coveralls, with the name "Spike" stitched on the breast in powder-blue thread, gestured for quiet as he spoke into the telephone receiver cradled under his chin. "Listen, we're not a towing service," the man said, "and we don't do sector calls. If you can get the system in here to us, we'll take a look at it and give you an estimate." He rolled his eyes at Neuwirth and made a jerking-off motion with his left hand.

"What does he mean by that?" asked Salahuddin, Neuwirth's new trainee.

"Never mind," Neuwirth said, kneading the bridge of his nose with one hand. The sounds of loud voices mixed with the raucous clatter of machinery poured in from the adjacent service bays, while grungy rock-and-roll squirted from a tinny loudspeaker overhead. "Good grief, I think I'm getting one of my migraines."

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"Yeah, well, same to you, buddy!" Spike shouted into the telephone receiver. "Saints be praised and all that." He slammed the phone down behind the counter, then sauntered over to Neuwirth and Salahuddin. His hair was thinning and slicked back, and he could have done with a good shave. "Now, what can I do for you gents?"

Neuwirth shook his head, eyes closed. "We're here to pick up the Jordanelle system," he said with exaggerated patience. "It was supposed to be finished a hundred microns ago."

"Jordanelle, Jordanelle," Spike said, leafing through a stack of ragged three-by-five cards. "Now, lessee."

"Oh, come on! This is the third time we've had it in!"

The phone rang, and Spike held up a finger. "'Scuse me just a minute."

Neuwirth turned to Salahuddin. "I can't believe this," he said, gritting his teeth.

"Surely it can't always be like this," said Salahuddin, who was several inches shorter and several pounds heavier than his trainer, and whose wings barely cleared the top of his head. "I would have thought — "

"Well, you would have been wrong!" Neuwirth barked, much more harshly than he had intended. A shooting pain arced through his head, and he covered his face with a penitent hand. "Oh, stars above, this noise is going to drive me out of my gourd."

"All right, all right," Spike was saying into the phone as he scribbled on a pad of sticky notes. "So the fourth planet's moons are losing about a day on every orbit. Sounds to me like you've got a slow gravity leak somewhere, maybe a little black hole floating around where there shouldn't be one, but you'll have to bring it in to be sure. Yeah, we'll just throw it up on the lift and run some diagnostics. Let me check our schedule here. Hmm, how about a week from this Wednesday? How'd that work?"

An impish-looking young man with a ridiculously large pompadour hairdo wandered in through the door from the service bays, wiping his hands on a fuzzy, snow-white rag. "'Scuse me a moment," said Spike, then covered the receiver with his hand. "Hey, Biff, wanna take care of Mr. Neuwirth? He's here for the Jordanelle system."

"Sure, sure," Biff said. He poured himself a cup of coffee from a white ceramic percolator behind the counter, then strolled around to where Neuwirth and Salahuddin were waiting. "Been running tests on Jordanelle all morning. Think we've finally pinpointed the problem."

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"Uh-huh, sure," said Neuwirth with an exasperated shiver of his wings. "I've heard *that* story before."

Biff raised his eyebrows, looking wounded, and smoothed back his pompadour. "No, no, really. I don't know how we could have missed it the first two times. Looks like that sun of yours has been losing power because of an imbalance in the hydrogen-helium mix."

"An imbalance? Well, of *course* there's an imbalance, you — "

"Hey, hey, Pops, just cool your jets for a micron," Biff said, holding up a hand. "We've got a handle on the problem, and it looks like we'll have you out of here in another...oh, say, fifty microns or so. We've just got to refit the — "

"Spare me the details," Neuwirth said wearily. "Just make sure it works this time."

Biff flashed a twisted grin. "Hey, no prob, Pops. We're the best there are, you know." He took a long sip of his coffee.

"What about the estimate you gave us earlier?"

"I'm afraid we've had to revise both the time estimate and the bill." He shrugged without much evidence of apology. "We're going to have to replace the subspace regulator valve, and those don't come cheap. Now, if you'd just have a seat over there in the waiting area..."

Neuwirth blew out a frustrated breath. "Oh, come on, Salahuddin. Let's let these bloodsuckers get back to work."

Salahuddin trotted after Neuwirth as they returned to the marble-tiled waiting area. "Are we really going to allow them to treat us like that, Mr. Neuwirth, sir? We have a lot to do. There's that comet going out of control in the Dandrite system, and — "

Neuwirth spread his wings helplessly as he seated himself in a chair upholstered in cracked white vinyl. "We really don't have any choice, I'm afraid."

"We could take our business somewhere else," said Salahuddin.

Neuwirth picked up a popular physics magazine from the end table beside him and leafed through it without much interest. "It's like young Biff told us," he said. "These men are the best mechanics there are. Why else do you think they ended up here?"

"But — but how can we stand by and allow them to gouge us like this?"

Neuwirth set aside the magazine and fixed his trainee with a serious stare. "So what do you propose we do, Mr. Salahuddin? That sun needs fixing, and we certainly can't do it ourselves."

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"Sue," Salahuddin said firmly. "We can hire ourselves a lawyer, and — "

Neuwirth stared at Salahuddin in surprise, then barked out a short and bitter laugh. "Talk about gouging." He shook his head. "You certainly have a lot to learn, my friend." Neuwirth arched his back, stretched his wings, and picked up his magazine again, immersing himself in an article about the best ways to eradicate unwanted wormholes from planetary orbits.

For several minutes, the only sound was the music of Nirvana grinding out from the overhead loudspeaker. Then Salahuddin spoke again. "Mr. Neuwirth, sir...I have a question."

Neuwirth raised his eyebrows. "Yes?"

Salahuddin seemed a little hesitant. "What I am wondering is...well, I hope you won't be offended, sir, but is this heaven or is it hell?"

Neuwirth kept his attention on the magazine. "Ah, so you've finally decided to ask a meaningful question," he said, rubbing his aching temples. "Answer me this, my little friend. Would you still go for that M.B.A. if you could do it over again? Eh?"

There was no answer. Neuwirth had expected none.

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A SCIENTIST'S NOTEBOOK

GREGORY BENFORD

AMERICA AS ROME

SCIENCE often proceeds by analogy. So does most ordinary thinking, for science can be called a rigorous form of common sense.

When Galileo observed four large moons orbiting Jupiter, he soon applied this picture to the solar system itself, with the sun at the center. Copernicus nailed down the analogy, though at first his model did not make predictions any better than the older, Earth-centered scheme.

Charles Darwin read Thomas Malthus, the English economist who reasoned that human populations would inevitably grow to outstrip their food supplies. From this Darwin built up a theory of natural selection which stressed the eternal competition for any advantage that can help a species reproduce. Malthus had prepared the intellectuals for Darwin's leap from economics to biology.

Such parallels are the essence of analogy, one of our most powerful intellectual tools.

The Greeks originally meant by *ana logon* a similarity in proportion, as among triangles. Plato used the method more broadly, as when he argued that the Idea of the Good makes the world intelligible, just as the sun itself makes vision possible in the perceptual world.

This is a big leap, far less convincing to a modern mind than the simple proportions of triangles. Why?

First, Plato assumed we knew that the Good would light up the world of logic. To us, simply capitalizing nouns does not prove they exist, or anything about their properties beyond what's already in their definition.

More important, some other ideas, such as Good's opposite, Evil, might do just as good (or evil) a job. The analogy is shaky.

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Yet most scientific discoveries are made by leaps of analogy. The first model of the atom, assembled by Niels Bohr from pieces of classical physics with some hand-wrought finesse, used a picture of electrons moving in orbits around a nucleus. Illustrations of this still appear in some textbooks, looking much like a little solar system — continuing Galileo's picture.

Certainly we would go astray if we then concluded that, say, something like nuclear fission is the way solar systems break up.

In analogy, the resemblances pointed out must be relevant to the point you want to establish. In science, analogies can be fountainheads of new ideas precisely because they use old, true ones in new ways.

Often people speak of communities as "organic," invoking a biological picture. A city can indeed look like the body of a great beast, its arteries aglow with energy in an evening panorama. But in cities individuals have their own motives, rights and responsibilities, and can act independently much of the time, whereas cells do not.

So we should look to functional similarities, rather than mere appearances. Nowhere is this more true than in human affairs.

In much classic science fiction, society's response to a new invention or idea is portrayed by analogy with earlier changes.

Space, the final frontier, some see as much like the American western frontier — and so Gene Roddenberry pitched *Star Trek* to the studio as "Wagon Train in space."

In H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* time is like a spatial coordinate, so one can travel along it without moving in the ordinary space of experience — and the traveler emerges into a future, just where London used to be. No one wonders why, since the Earth has moved many millions of miles by then, the traveler doesn't materialize in raw space, and die gasping for air.

The most extended science fictional analogy is probably Isaac Asimov's implicit comparison of ancient Rome with his galactic empire in the *Foundation* series. Well before Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Rome haunted the West. Modern science fiction emerged as the United States approached what many see as its zenith, and *Foundation* appeared at just the moment. It asks a great question: can empires save themselves?

Only a theory of history itself could tell us. So Isaac invented just that, psychohistory, and we were off on a series of mental adventures.

Even before him, L. Sprague DeCamp's *Lest Darkness Fall* asked

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if a modern day American classicist, who conveniently knew Latin, could save Rome from itself. DeCamp argued that technology, adroitly introduced, could have knitted together the Empire and staved off disaster indefinitely.

He favored the printing press, a signaling system for fast communications, and perhaps gunpowder to use against the barbarians — though his hero never did get the tricky concoction to work right. (In William Golding's 1956 "Envoy Extraordinary" a Roman inventor cannot get the Empire to consider his steam engine, gunpowder or printing press; I wonder if this is a pointed reply to DeCamp?)

Lest Darkness Fall is a classic, as crisp and savvy today as when first published in 1939. Appropriately for science fiction, it argues that technology and a scientific world view can overcome social distress. I am less sure that the recipe would have worked in Rome, though, for as Golding implies, social openness is crucial.

But the motivation for asking the deeper question still lurks in American society, stronger than ever. We inherit our images of Imperial decline from the recent experience of the British, from earlier European empires, but most powerfully, from the colossal example of antiquity. How much do we resemble Rome?

To elicit how analogy works, and apply thinking as rigorous as analogy can be, suppose we take up the oft-quoted similarity of our time to the crest of Rome.

Start with recent history. In the Gulf War of the early 1990s America won a quick victory. The war also gave people something to cheer about and took their minds off other problems. Similarly, the Later Roman Empire often made small punitive expeditions into barbarian areas of Germany, not for military purposes, but to boost citizen morale at home. Several newspaper editorials remarked on the comparison.

Many Americans feel the United States reached its peak in the 1950s and since has gradually decayed from within. While the U.S. remains the most militarily powerful nation the world has ever seen, it has serious internal problems. The quality of an analogy lies in detailed study of exactly how parallel a proposed analogy is. Let's look at a few obvious issues.

Much has been made of the decay of the family farm in our time. Romans remarked on the same problem. By the third century A.D. the Roman system of farming had fallen increasingly under the control of a

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few rich land holders. Due to excessive taxation, many small family farms had been assimilated into large farms, which yielded rural depopulation and growing migration into the urban areas of the empire. Even in cities, though, population often did not increase, in part due to increased disease rates there.

Decline in soil productivity and regional climatic changes caused ten to fifteen percent of cropland to remain untilled. With the lack of fertilizer, each harvest became increasingly unproductive, causing more small farms to go into debt, only to be bought by larger farms.

Despotic emperors invited German immigrants into the Empire to labor in the rural areas being depopulated. Competition for labor between the rural poor and immigrants sometimes became violent. The underpaid or unpaid immigrants soon made it nearly impossible for the Empire's poor to compete, further moving the original land holders off the land and into overpopulated cities.

In vain, Theodosius I issued a decree that made the farmers "slaves of the land itself to which they are born," attempting to keep the small farm intact and harvest tax revenue. He also hoped to stop brigandage and formation of roving gangs.

Today in America the family farm is in dire straits. Between 1950 and 1980 the number of people living on farms fell from 23 million to less than eight million, while the average size of the farm doubled. Most rural residents are no longer farmers; people hired on farms account for only ten percent of the rural population. About eighty percent of American farmers rent land or work for large farm management firms, a condition shockingly similar to the manorial system in ancient Rome.

The top four percent of the new "superfarms" produce one half of our food, but much of the 200 billion dollar farm debt rests upon the small farms. As well, the United States no longer has the great excess of land, water, and energy that we take for granted. The lowering water levels in the Midwest, higher fuel costs for farm machinery, wind and water erosion, increased compaction and salinity of soil, and lack of exploitable, non-polluted resources all are formidable problems.

What of the cities the farmers went to? Taxation and other economic forces had eliminated the middle class by the late Empire, after about the third century A.D. With no hope in agriculture, Rome's homeless and lower classes flocked to the empire's decaying inner cities where they passed the days, as one historian described it, "among wine-bars, cook-

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shops, dice-tables, chariot-races, and gladiatorial combats."

By the mid-fourth century 300,000 citizens in Rome alone received free bread rations from the government. These programs only temporarily solved the problem and encouraged more homeless to swamp the cities. Meanwhile, public works programs disintegrated because of external invasions of German tribes and internal rebellions among ethnic groups. Deferred maintenance, the most obvious sign of a slide into decay, became the norm as repair of public buildings slipped. Private maintenance was often taxed.

The emperor Honorius alone issued ten edicts trying to salvage the empire's decaying roads. Crime caused townsmen to become politically inert, preoccupied with protecting their property. By the end of the empire, thoroughly dilapidated cities had become unsafe havens of decay, disease, and crime.

Thousands despaired of making an honest living at all and went underground to form traveling gangs of robbers and bandits. The worst occurred in Gaul, where ethnic hoodlums formed a quasi-militaristic band, the Bacaudae, or rebels, which resisted opposing Roman forces from 435 to 437 A.D. Forced to take matters into their own hands, this group formed its own rudimentary "People's Court" for criminal cases.

Government lacked resources to deal with such internal problems; no longer could it protect people and possessions. The Roman army retreated from the rebellious areas. These were the only orderly security, since Romans did not rely on government forces for stability nearly as much as we do. At the official end of the empire in 476 A.D., Rome was in control of only a tenth of what it previously had ruled.

This reminds us of some present cities, where whole sections are being written off as anarchistic badlands and many have adopted a policy of crime containment rather than prevention.

U.S. citizens regard crime as the number one problem in their communities; forty-five percent are afraid to leave their houses after dark. Last year in black communities, homicide was the leading cause of death. City dwellers are two and a half times more likely to be robbed than people living in suburbs and five times more likely than those living in rural areas.

The Police Research Forum recently found that "patrol officers have become little more than hurried report takers." An officer remarked that sometimes they "let the bozos shoot it out, then go in, pick up the bodies

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and arrest the winner." In New York, only five percent of robberies result in an arrest and only one in 200 result in a prison sentence. Despite this the United States has the greatest prison population of the world, accepting nine hundred new inmates a week.

Already, immigration looks like a major issue for 1996. Consider Rome. By the fourth century A.D. Rome had assimilated most of the people and cultures of the Mediterranean into the Empire of "one people." Claudian, an early Roman writer, wrote:

She is the only one who has received
The conquered in her arms and cherished all
The human race under a common name,
Treating them as children, not her slaves.
She called these subjects Roman citizens
And linked far worlds with ties of loyalty.

During this time German tribes driven by despair and hunger entered the empire, but unlike previous immigrants they did not blend well into Roman civilization; often they only managed to co-exist instead of assimilating. Due to excessive numbers of Germans in 382 A.D., the Emperor Theodosius allowed the Germanic "barbarians" to form "separate, autonomous units" to serve in the army. They did not understand or appreciate the nobility of this treatment, and instead interpreted it as weakness.

The empire's minority groups, principally immigrants from the north, no longer considered themselves Romans first, but Visigoths, Franks, or Vandals. They rebelled against the empire and could not be controlled. Eventually six separate ethnic kingdoms replaced the Empire.

America has been the world's most successful assimilator of different people. Changing from assimilation to separatism, as seems to be happening now, threatens to fracture the brittle bonds which hold our nation together.

If one issue does seem to unite Americans, it is mismanaged government. This, too, is an old theme. The Later Roman Empire was plagued with bad leadership.

Continuously replaced, emperors struggled to physically protect the empire and maintain public works. Simple directives could not affect the Empire's complex problems. Few new ideas emerged to control the obvious decay.

The empire's western capital and emperor moved from Rome to Ravenna for safety. There the gov-

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ernment became increasingly isolated, issuing ineffectual edicts, oblivious to the problems of the empire. Documents of the later empire were filled with praise of the emperor, proclaiming "Eternal Rome, Victory, and Conquest" even after the sack of Rome by Alaric in 410 A.D.

Corruption made the educated rich "feel that politics was a dirty business, which they preferred to avoid." Less educated army officials tried to maintain the government, while the rich became interested solely in their own wealth, or in pursuing secure, honorable positions in the Church.

A governmental bureaucracy of vast size and deteriorating quality swelled steadily. It issued edicts that could not possibly be enforced as the government took on increasing responsibilities it could not enforce.

Civil laws often became increasingly ambiguous, revealing confusions between sin and crime. As an historian of jurisprudence remarked, lawyers "employed their audacious, windy eloquence for criminal frauds, procrastinated by creating hopeless legal tangles" until the civil administration ground to a halt.

Recently, a friend told me about a TV cable channel carrying "All O.J., all day!" — and I did not realize he was joking. Law seems as removed from reality as the government. Some citizens feel we have lost the Republic and that government is interested only in control.

In antiquity, economic decline ran in remorseless parallel. Along with infrastructure decay, dangerous cities and inefficient government, Roman business deteriorated. The rural poor surrendered themselves unconditionally to the richer estate-holders for protection against German invaders, oppressive Roman authorities, and violent crime. Estates became fortified and more compact, foreshadowing the castles which would follow.

The Late Roman Empire totally alienated the lower class through taxation. While the influential rich largely escaped their tax obligation, the middle and lower classes bore a crushing tax burden.

Like modern liberal democracies, the middle-class was the backbone of the early and middle Roman Empire. But enormous inflation and the erosion of middle class wealth turned the middle class against the state. Eventually the entire class vanished as a two-tiered society of rich land owners and poor land tenants emerged.

A common theme these days is that the rich have gotten richer, the poor have gotten poorer — and the middle class has paid the tab for irresponsible behavior on both extremes. Millions have lost their middle class

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jobs in aging industries like autos and steel, plummeting into the minimum-wage realm of floor mopping and hamburger flipping.

Some respond to the daily newspaper with fatalism — and unconsciously ape the past. By the third century A.D. the Roman world began to fondly look back upon its previous glories more and more. Increasingly, public officials were compared to Caesar, Augustus and Scipio. One Late Roman scholar, Macrobius, advised, "we must always venerate antiquity. No age has ever looked back with such passion."

Ammianus, a Later Roman general, incorrectly compared the Visigoth invaders to the previous German tribes of five hundred years earlier — a bad analogy—leading directly to the crushing Roman defeat at Adrianople. Self-satisfaction with previous glories caused the Romans to sluggishly react to their desperate problems.

Christian theology did not help the situation. A cleric asked, "If heaven and earth are to pass away, why is it not surprising if at some time the state is going to come to a stop?" By the fourth century A.D. many viewed it as only a matter of time until the Empire fell and that the inevitable fall was part of God's plan. Few citizens cared about the empire, especially Christians who were told, "you would acquire greater merit if you served a higher fatherland," that of God rather than the state.

Apparently in the empire's last century many Romans felt the fall was unavoidable, and hoped only for their own personal future. Writing of the time echoes with such sentiments; stoicism emerged as the conventional philosophical wisdom.

I must admit that to me, our popular entertainment is often ugly, snide, and overwhelmingly pessimistic; both art and popular music often seems the howl of minds which feel trapped by forces beyond their control. Reading Gibbon, one finds similar sentiments.

Arnold Toynbee in his *Study Of History* maintained there is a "cyclical development and decline of civilizations." Citing the Roman Empire, his theory claims that initially a civilization does not realize its decline and that, once it does, it is already too late for recovery. James Blish was fond of Toynbee, though he preferred Oswald Spengler's metaphysical theory of history; much of his science fiction uses such ideas.

Analogy proceeds by reminding us of what we know, then advancing this as a model for something we do not yet comprehend. Theories of history do much the same. In science fiction, cyclical theories seem unpopular because they promise no per-

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manent opening out; horizons inevitably close in again. Spengler saw the shape of history as epitomized by the cyclical evolution of great civilizations, which he labeled the Classical, the Arabian and the Western.

This is essentially a biological analogy of birth, growth and youth, maturity and aging, then cultural death. The West, he holds, is now in late decline, which Spengler calls Caesarism. In this view, then, the rise of Ross Perot is the inevitable Caesarist quest for a capable outside figure who can straighten out the corrupt system.

Blish proposed that science fiction itself is a symptom of "syncretism" — the blending of different beliefs or practices. Blish dryly remarked in his last essay that science fiction "adopts as its subject matter that occult area where a science in decay [elaborately decorated with technology] overlaps the second religiousness — hence, incidentally, its automatic receptivity from its emergence to such notions as time travel, extrasensory perception, dianetics, Dean Drives, faster-than-light travel, reincarnation and parallel universes."

Dianetics has changed names to Scientology, to gain legal shelter as a religion, with astounding success. The Dean Drive was an aberration in judgment about physics by John W. Campbell, a supposed violation of Newton's Laws which failed to prove true.

Some of this list I can easily argue with. The issues of time travel and faster-than-light motion are more active areas of physics research than ever; such is the way of quantum field theory.

Wormholes may exist, allowing us to reach the stars in seconds. Technically this is not faster-than-light travel. Wormholes were recognized as consequences of general relativity by Einstein himself in the 1930s, when they were termed Einstein-Rosen bridges; wormhole is a recent, sexier term. Time travel is a pesky irritant to many physicists, for there still seems no definitive proof that general relativity, even modified to include quantum mechanics, rules it out.

Not that Blish was simon pure in his own work. He used telepathy in several novels and stories. Dianetics held him in thrall for a while, though afterward he rather guiltily erased all references to the Dianetically anointed ["clears"] from reprinted earlier stories.

Still, he saw sf itself as an inevitably flawed symptom of an era fated to suffer decline. Blish's adoption of Spengler is sobering, for it elevates the role of analogy to metaphysics. As Spengler predicted, in modern America there is an increased look-

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ing back upon previous achievements with extreme fondness; nostalgia is a business. Has America passed the point of no return, as Toynbee and Spengler suggest?

Blish faced this outlook soberly. "It is not a Utopian prospect — Utopia being, anyhow, only a pure example of linearism in a cyclical world — but neither need it be occasion for despair...we have free will within our role and era, as long as we know what it is and *when* we are."

Of course, James Blish was quite convinced that Spengler's descriptive model of history was a prescriptive plan for our future. Metaphysical analogy, though, must conform to the same rules as ordinary analogy or scientific analogy.

Was Rome truly like us? Of course the differences are vast. Rome had little science, so lacked the technological driver which opens fresh possibilities. Also, we dwell on the collapse of Rome's western half; the east held on in Istanbul for centuries more.

Today the liberal, capitalist, democratic West, led by the U.S.A., has no visible ideological opponent, except perhaps the budding authoritarian capitalists of southeast Asia. The Romans faced barbarians who often preferred their own ways, but liked the comforts of the Empire.

Further, we have a clear frontier, space, a hundred miles straight over our heads. We can choose to respond to that frontier, and such an opening out would reset the Spenglerian clock — perhaps. Lastly, Spengler felt in the 1920s that Western science is in decline, and felt that it would steeply erode in the near future. [He seems either unaware of the implications of relativity and quantum mechanics, or to have misunderstood them.] This constitutes a prediction, now quite soundly falsified.

So, despite the evidence marshaled here, I suspect the Roman analogy is wrong in major ways. We should not take it as given, and with resignation console ourselves, as Blish does in the last quotation above.

Still, the troublesome correspondences should give us pause. The increasing centralization of power in Imperial Rome could have been offset; we can make similar corrections to our society. This may be the best use of analogy in general, from real sciences to fake sciences like psychohistory. Analogy can warn, identify problems and suggest solutions. And by offering us the fate of Rome, it can move us to action.

Comments and objections to this column are welcome. Please send them to Gregory Benford, Physics Department, Univ. Calif., Irvine, CA 92717. For e-mail: gbenford@uci.edu.

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The second of our War of the Worlds *stories is the third story in the issue by a columnist. Gregory Benford collaborated with award-winner David Brin in this tale of yet another writer, Jules Verne, and his encounter with the Martians.*

Paris Conquers All

By Gregory Benford & David Brin

I COMMENCE THIS ACCOUNT with a prosaic stroll at eventide — a saunter down the avenues of *la Ville Lumière*, during which the ordinary swiftly gave way to the extraordinary. I was in Paris to consult with my publisher, as well as to visit old companions and partake of the exquisite cuisine, which my provincial home in Amiens cannot boast. Though I am now a gentleman of advanced age, nearing my 70th year, I am still quite able to favor the savories, and it remains a treat to survey the lovely demoiselles as they exhibit the latest fashions on the boulevards, enticing smitten young men and breaking their hearts at the same time.

I had come to town that day believing — as did most others — that there still remained weeks, or days at least, before the alien terror ravaging southern France finally reached the valley of the Seine. *Île de France* would be defended at all costs, we were assured. So it came to pass that, tricked by this false complaisance, I was in the capital the very afternoon that the crisis struck.

Paris! It still shone as the most splendid exemplar of our progressive age — all the more so in that troubled hour, as tense anxiety seemed only to add

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to the city's loveliness — shimmering at night with both gas and electric lights, and humming by day with new electric trams, whose marvelous wires crisscrossed above the avenues like gossamer heralds of a new era.

I had begun here long ago as a young attorney, having followed into my father's profession. Yet that same head of our family had also accepted my urge to strike out on a literary road, in the theater and later down expansive voyages of prose. "Drink your fill of Paris, my son!" the good man said, seeing me off from the Nantes railway station. "Devour these wondrous times. Your senses are keen. Share your insights. The world will change because of it."

Without such help and support, would I ever have found within myself the will, the daring, to explore the many pathways of the future, with all their wonders and perils? Ever since the Martian invasion began, I had found myself reflecting on an extraordinary life filled with such good fortune, especially now that *all* human luck seemed about to be revoked. Now, with terror looming from the south and west, would it all soon come to nought? All that I had achieved? Everything humanity had accomplished, after so many centuries climbing upward from ignorance?

It was in such an uncharacteristically dour mood that I strolled in the company of M. Beauchamp, a gentleman scientist, that pale afternoon less than an hour before I had my first contact with the horrible Martian machines. Naturally, I had been following the eye-witness accounts which first told of plunging fireballs, striking the Earth with violence that sent gouts of soil and rock spitting upward, like miniature versions of the outburst at Krakatau. These impacts had soon proved to be far more than mere meteoritic phenomena, since there soon emerged, like insects from a subterranean lair, three-legged beings bearing incredible malevolence toward the life of this planet. Riding gigantic tripod mechanisms, these unwelcome guests soon set forth with one sole purpose in mind — destructive conquest!

The ensuing carnage, the raking fire, the sweeping flames — none of these horrors had yet reached the fair country above the river Loire...not yet. But reports all too vividly told of villages trampled, farmlands seared black, and hordes of refugees cut down as they fled.

Invasion. The word came to mind all too easily remembered. We of northern France knew the pain just twenty-eight years back, when Sedan fell and this sweet land trembled under an attacker's boot. Several Paris quarters still bear scars where Prussian firing squads tore moonlike craters out of

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plaster walls, mingling there the ochre life blood of communards, royalists and bourgeois alike.

Now Paris trembled before advancing powers so malign that, in contrast, those Prussians of 1870 were like beloved cousins, welcome to town for a picnic!

All of this I pondered while taking leave, with Beauchamp, of the École Militaire, the national military academy, where a briefing had just been given to assembled dignitaries, such as ourselves. From the stone portico we gazed toward the Seine, past the encampment of the Seventeenth Corps of Volunteers, their tents arrayed across trampled grass and smashed flower beds of the ironically named *Champ-de-Mars.* The meadow of the god of war.

Towering over this scene of intense (and ultimately futile) martial activity stood the tower of M. Eiffel, built for the recent exhibition, that marvelously fashioned testimonial to metal and ingenuity...and also target of so much vitriol.

"The public's regard for it may improve with time," I ventured, observing that Beauchamp's gaze lay fixed on the same magnificent spire.

My companion snorted with derision at the curving steel flanks. "An eyesore, of no enduring value," he countered, and for some time we distracted ourselves from more somber thoughts by arguing the relative merits of Eiffel's work, while turning east to walk toward the Sorbonne. Of late, experiments in the transmission of radio-tension waves had wrought unexpected pragmatic benefits, using the great tower as an *antenna.* I wagered Beauchamp there would be other advantages, in time.

Alas, even this topic proved no lasting diversion from thoughts of danger to the south. Fresh in our minds were reports from the wine districts. The latest outrage — that the home of Vouvray was now smashed, trampled and burning. This was my favorite of all the crisp, light vintages—better, even, than a fresh Sancerre. Somehow, that loss seemed to strike home more vividly than dry casualty counts, already climbing to the millions.

"There must be a method!" I proclaimed, as we approached the domed brilliance of *Les Invalides.* "There has to be a scientific approach to destroying the invaders."

"The military is surely doing its best," Beauchamp said.

"Buffoons!"

"But you heard of their losses. The regimants and divisions decimated — " Beauchamp stuttered. "The army dies for France! For humanity — of which France is surely the best example."

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I turned to face him, aware of an acute paradox — that the greatest martial mind of all time lay entombed in the domed citadel nearby. Yet even he would have been helpless before a power that was not of this world.

"I do not condemn the army's courage," I assured.

"Then how can you speak — "

"No no! I condemn their lack of imagination!"

"To defeat the incredible takes — "

"Vision!"

Timidly, for he knew my views, he advanced, "I saw in the *Match* that the British have consulted with the fantasist, Mr. Wells."

To this I could only cock an eye. "He will give them no aid, only imaginings."

"But you just said — "

"*Vision* is not the same as dreaming."

At that moment the cutting smell of sulfuric acid wafted on a breeze from the reducing works near the river. (Even in the most beautiful of cities, rude work has its place.) Beauchamp mistook my expression of disgust for commentary upon the Englishman, Wells.

"He is quite successful. Many compare him to you."

"An unhappy analogy. His stories do not repose on a scientific basis. I make use of physics. He invents."

"In this crisis — "

"I go to the moon in a cannon ball. He goes in an airship, which he constructs of a metal which does away with the law of gravitation. *Ça c'est très joli!* — but show me this metal. Let him produce it!"

Beauchamp blinked. "I quite agree — but, then, is not our present science woefully inadequate to the task at hand — defending ourselves against monstrous invaders?"

We resumed our walk. Leaving behind the crowds paying homage at Napoleon's Tomb, we made good progress along rue de Varenne, with the Petite Palais now visible across the river, just ahead.

"We lag technologically behind these foul beings, that I grant. But only by perhaps a century or two."

"Oh surely, more than that! To fly between the worlds — "

"Can be accomplished several ways, all within our comprehension, if not our grasp."

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"What of the reports by astronomers of great explosions, seen earlier this year on the surface of the distant ruddy planet? They now think these were signs of the Martian invasion fleet being launched. Surely we could not expend such forces!"

I waved away his objection. "Those are nothing more than I have already foreseen in *From the Earth to the Moon*, which I would remind you I published thirty-three years ago, at the conclusion of the American Civil War."

"You think the observers witnessed the belching of great Martian cannon?"

"Of course! I had to make adjustments, engineering alterations, while designing my moon vessel. The shell could not be of steel, like one of Eiffel's bridges. So I conjectured that the means of making light projectiles of aluminum will come to pass. These are not basic limitations, you see — " I waved them away — "but mere details."

The wind had shifted, and with relief I now drew in a heady breath redolent with the smells of cookery rising from the city of cuisine. Garlic, roasting vegetables, the dark aromas of warming meats — such a contrast with the terror which advanced on the city, and on our minds. Along rue St. Grenelle, I glanced into one of the innumerable tiny cafes. Worried faces stared moodily at their reflections in the broad zinc bars, stained by spilled absinthe. Wine coursed down anxious throats. Murmurs floated on the fitful air.

"So the Martians come by cannon, the workhorse of battle," Beauchamp murmured.

"There are other methods," I allowed.

"Your dirigibles?"

"Come come, Beauchamp! You know well that no air permeates the realm between the worlds."

"Then what methods do they employ to maneuver? They fall upon Asia, Africa, the Americans, the deserving British — all with such control, such intricate planning."

"Rockets! Though perhaps there are flaws in my original cannon ideas — I am aware that passengers would be squashed to jelly by the firing of such a great gun — nothing similar condemns the use of cylinders of slowly exploding chemicals."

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"To steer between planets? Such control!"

"Once the concept is grasped, it is but a matter of ingenuity to bring it to pass. Within a century, Beauchamp, we shall see rockets of our own rise from this ponderous planet, into the heavens. I promise you that!"

"Assuming we survive the fortnight," Beauchamp remarked gloomily. "Not to mention a century."

"To live, we must think. Our thoughts must encompass the entire range of possibility."

I waved my furled umbrella at the sky, sweeping it around and down *rue de Rennes*, toward the southern eminence of Montparnasse. By chance my gaze followed the pointing tip — and so it I was among the first to spy one of the Martian machines, like a monstrous insect, cresting that ill-fated hill.

There is something in the human species which abhors oddity, the unnatural. We are double in arms, legs, eyes, ears, even nipples (if I may venture such an indelicate comparison; but remember, I am a man of science at all times). Two-ness is fundamental to us, except when Nature dictates singularity — we have but one mouth, and one organ of regeneration. Such biological matters are fundamental. Thus, the instantaneous feelings horror at first sight of the *three-ness* of the invaders — which was apparent even in the external design of their machinery. I need not explain the revulsion to any denizen of our world. These were alien beings, in the worst sense of the word.

"They have broken through!" I cried. "The front must have collapsed."

Around us crowds now took note of the same dread vision, looming over the sooty Montparnasse railway station. Men began to run, women to wail. Yet, some courageous ones of both sexes ran the other way, to help bolster the city's slim, final bulwark, a line from which rose vollies of crackling rifle fire.

By unspoken assent, Beauchamp and I refrained from joining the general fury. Two old men, wealthier in dignity than physical stamina, we had more to offer with our experience and seasoned minds than with the frail strength of our arms.

"Note the rays," I said dispassionately, as for the first time we witnessed the fearful lashing of that horrid heat, smiting the helpless trains, igniting rail cars and exploding locomotives at a mere touch. I admit I was struggling to hold both reason and resolve, fastening upon details as a drowning man might cling to flotsam.

"Could they be like Hertzian waves?" Beauchamp asked in wavering tones.

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We had been excited by the marvelous German discovery, and its early application to experiments in wireless signaling. Still, even I had to blink at Beauchamp's idea—for the first time envisioning the concentration of such waves into searing beams. "Possibly," I allowed. "Legends say that Archimedes concentrated light to beat back Roman ships, at Syracuse.... But the waves Hertz found were meters long, and of less energy than a fly's wingbeat. These — "

I jumped, despite my efforts at self control, as another, much *larger* machine appeared to the west of the first, towering majestically, also spouting bright red torrents of destruction. It set fires on the far southern horizon, the beam playing over city blocks, much as a cat licks a mouse.

"We shall never defeat such power," Beauchamp said morosely.

"Certainly we do not have much time," I allowed. "But you put my mind into harness, my friend."

Around us people now openly bolted. Carriages rushed past without regard to panicked figures who dashed across the avenues. Horses clopped madly by, whipped by their masters. I stopped to unroll the paper from a Colombian cigar. Such times demand clear thinking. It was up to the higher minds and classes to display character and resolve.

"No, we must seize upon some technology closer to hand," I said. "Not the Hertzian waves, but perhaps something allied..."

Beauchamp glanced back at the destructive tripods with lines of worry creasing his brow. "If rifle and cannon prove useless against these marching machines — "

"Then we must apply another science, not mere mechanics."

"Biology? There are the followers of Pasteur, of course." Beauchamp was plainly struggling to stretch his mind. "If we could somehow get these Martians — has anyone yet seen one? — to drink contaminated milk..."

I had to chuckle. "Too literal, my friend. Would you serve it to them on a silver plate?"

Beauchamp drew himself up. "I was only attempting — "

"No matter. The point is now moot. Can you not see where the second machine stands, atop the very site of Pasteur's now ruined Institute?"

Although biology is a lesser cousin in the family of science, I nevertheless imagined with chagrin those fine collections of bottled specimens, now kicked and scattered under splayed tripod feet, tossing the remnants to the swirling winds. No help there, alas.

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"Nor are the ideas of the Englishman, Darwin, of much use, for they take thousands of years to have force. No, I have in mind physics, but rather more recent work."

I had been speaking from the airy spot wherein my head makes words before thought has yet taken form, as often happens when a concept lumbers upward from the mind's depths, coming, coming...

Around us lay the most beautiful city in the world, already flickering with gas lamps, lining the prominent avenues. Might that serve as inspiration? Poison gas? But no, the Martians had already proved invulnerable to even the foul clouds which the Army tried to deploy.

But then what? I have always believed that the solution to tomorrow's problems usually lies in plain sight, in materials and concepts already at hand — just as the essential ideas for submarines, airships, and even interplanetary craft, have been apparent for decades. The trick lies in formulating the right combinations.

As that thought coursed through my mind, a noise erupted so cacophonously as to over-ride even the commotion further south. A rattling roar (accompanied by the plaint of already-frightened horses) approached from the *opposite* direction! Even as I turned round toward the river, I recognized the clatter of an explosive-combustion engine, of the type invented not long ago by Herr Benz, now propelling a wagon bearing several men and a pile of glittering apparatus! At once I observed one unforeseen advantage of horseless transportation — to allow human beings to ride *toward* danger that no horse on Earth would ever approach.

The hissing contraption ground to a halt not far from Beauchamp and me. Then a shout burst forth in that most penetrating of human accents — one habituated to open spaces and vast expanses.

"Come on, you Gol-durned piece of junk! Fire on up, or I'll turn ya into scrap b'fore the Martians do!"

The speaker was dressed as a workman, with bandoliers of tools arrayed across his broad, sturdy frame. A shock of reddish hair escaped under the rim of a large, curve-brimmed hat, of the type affected by the troupe of Buffalo Bill, when that showman's carnival was the sensation of Europe, some years back.

"Come now, Ernst," answered the man beside him, in a voice both more cultured and sardonic. "There's no purpose in berating a machine. Perhaps we are already near enough to acquire the data we seek."

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An uneasy alliance of distant cousins, I realized. Although I have always admired users of the English language for their boundless ingenuity, it can be hard to see the countrymen of Edgar Allan Poe as related to those of Walter Scott.

"What do you say, Fraunhoffer?" asked the Englishman of a third gentleman with the portly bearing of one who dearly loves his schnitzel, now peering through an array of lenses toward the battling tripods. "Can you get a good reading from here?"

"Bah!" The bald-pated German cursed. "From ze exploding buildings and fiery desolation, I get plenty of lines, those typical of combustion. But ze rays zemselves are absurd. Utterly absurd!"

I surmised that here were scientists at work, even as I had prescribed in my discourse to Beauchamp, doing the labor of sixty battalions. In such efforts by luminous minds lay our entire hope.

"Absurd how?" A fourth head emerged, that of a dark young man, wearing objects over his ears that resembled muffs for protection against cold weather, only these were made of wood, linked by black cord to a machine covered with dials. I at once recognized miniature speaker-phones, for presenting faint sounds directly to the ears. The young man's accent was Italian, and curiously calm. "What is absurd about the spectrum of-a the rays, Professor?"

"There *iss* no spectrum!" the German expounded. "My device shows just the one hue of red light we see with our naked eyes, when the rays lash destructive force. There are no absorption lines, just a single hue of brilliant red!"

The Italian pursed his lips in thought. "One *frequency*, perhaps...?"

"If you *insist* on comparing light to your vulgar Hertzian waves — "

So entranced was I by the discussion that I was almost knocked down by Beauchamp's frantic effort to gain my attention. I knew just one thing could bring him to behave so — the Martians must nearly be upon us! With this supposition in mind, I turned, expecting to see a disk-like foot of a leviathan preparing to crush us.

Instead, Beauchamp, white as a ghost, stammered and pointed with a palsied hand. "Verne, regardez!"

To my amazement, the invaders had abruptly changed course, swerving from the direct route to the Seine. Instead they turned left and were stomping

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swiftly toward the part of town that Beauchamp and I had only just left, crushing buildings to dust as they hurried ahead. At the time, we shared a single thought. The commanders of the battle tripods must have spied the military camp on the *Champ-de-Mars*. Or else they planned to wipe out the nearby military academy. It even crossed my mind that their objective might be the tomb of humanity's greatest general, to destroy that shrine, and with it our spirit to resist.

But no. Only much later did we realize the truth.

Here in Paris, our vanquishers suddenly had another kind of conquest in mind.

Flames spread as evening fell. Although the Martian rampage seemed to have slackened somewhat, the city's attitude of *sang-froid* was melting rapidly into frothy panic. The broad boulevards that Baron Haussmann gave the city during the Second Empire proved their worth as aisles of escape while buildings burned.

BUT NOT FOR ALL. By nightfall, Beauchamp and I found ourselves across the river at the new army headquarters, in the tree-lined Tuileries, just west of the Louvre — as if the military had decided to make its last stand in front of the great museum, delaying the invaders in order to give the curators more time to rescue treasures.

A great crowd surrounded a cage wherein, some said, several captured Martians cowered. Beauchamp rushed off to see, but I had learned to heed my subconscious—(to use the terminology of the Austrian alienist, Freud)—and wandered about the camp instead. Letting the spectacle play in my mind.

While a colonel with a sooty face drew arrows on a map, I found my gaze wandering to the trampled gardens, backlit by fire, and wondered what the painter, Camille Pissarro, would make of such a hellish scene. Just a month ago I had visited his apartment at 204 rue de Rivoli, to see a series of impressions he had undertaken to portray the peaceful Tuileries. Now, what a parody fate had decreed for these same gardens!

The colonel had explained that invader tripods came in two sizes, with the larger ones appearing to control the smaller. There were many of the latter kind, still rampaging the city suburbs, but all three of the great ones reported

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to be in Northern France had converged on the same site before nightfall, trampling back and forth across the *Champ-de-Mars*, presenting a series of strange behaviors that as yet had no lucid explanation. I did not need a military expert to tell me what I had seen with my own eyes...three titanic metal leviathans, twisting and capering as if in a languid dance, round and round the same object of their fierce attention.

I wandered away from the briefing, and peered for a while at the foreign scientists. The Italian and the German were arguing vehemently, invoking the name of the physicist Boltzmann, with his heretical theories of "atomic matter," trying to explain why the heat ray of the aliens should emerge as just a single, narrow color. But the discussion was over my head, so I moved on.

The American and the Englishman seemed more pragmatic, consulting with French munitions experts about a type of fulminating bomb that might be attached to a Martian machine's kneecap — if only some way could be found to carry it there...and to get the machine to stand still while it was attached. I doubted any explosive device devised overnight would suffice, since artillery had been next to useless, but I envied the adventure of the volunteer bomber, whoever it might be.

Adventure. I had spent decades writing about it, nearly always in the form of extraordinary voyages, with my heroes bound intrepidly across foaming seas, or under the waves, or over icecaps, or to the shimmering moon. Millions read my works to escape the tedium of daily life, and perhaps to catch a glimpse of the near future. Only now the future had arrived, containing enough excitement for anybody. We did not have to seek adventure far away. It had come to us. Right to our homes.

The crowd had ebbed somewhat, in the area surrounding the prisoners' enclosure, so I went over to join Beauchamp. He had been standing there for hours, staring at the captives, our only prizes in this horrid war, lying caged within stout iron bars, a dismal set of figures, limp yet atrociously fascinating.

"Have they any new ideas?" Beauchamp asked in a distracted voice, while keeping his eyes focused toward the four beings from Mars. "What new plans from the military geniuses?"

The last was spoken with thick sarcasm. His attitude had changed since noon, most clearly.

"They think the key is to be found in the master tripods, those that are right now stomping flat the region near Eiffel's Spire. Never have all three of

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the Master Machines been seen so close together. Experts suggest that the Martians may use *movement* to communicate. The dance they are now performing may represent a conference on strategy. Perhaps they are planning their next move, now that they have taken Paris."

Beauchamp grunted. It seemed to make as much sense as any other proposal to explain the aliens' sudden, strange behavior. While smaller tripods roamed about, dealing destruction almost randomly, the three great ones hopped and flopped like herons in a marsh, gesticulating wildly with their flailing legs, all this in marked contrast to the demure solidity of Eiffel's needle.

For a time we stared in silence at the prisoners, whose projectile had hurtled across unimaginable space only to shatter when it struck an unlucky hard place on the Earth, shattering open and leaving its occupants helpless, at our mercy. Locked inside iron, these captives did not look impressive, as if this world weighed heavy on their limbs. Or had another kind of languor invaded their beings? A depression of spirits, perhaps?

"I have pondered one thing, while standing here," Beauchamp mumbled. "An oddity about these creatures. We had been told that everything about them came in threes...note the trio of legs, and of arms, and of eyes — "

"As we have seen in newspaper sketches, for weeks," I replied.

"Indeed. But regard the one in the center. The one around which the others arrayed themselves, as if protectively...or perhaps in mutual competition?"

I saw the one he meant. Slightly larger than the rest, with a narrower aspect in the region of the conical head.

"Yes, it does seem different, somehow...but I don't see — "

I stopped, for just then I *did* see...and thoughts passed through my brain in a pell mell rush.

"Its legs and arms...there are *four!* Its symmetry is different! Can it be of another race? A servant species, perhaps? Or something superior? Or else..."

My next cry was of excited elation.

"Beauchamp! The master tripods...I believe I know what they are doing!

"Moreover, I believe this beckons us with opportunity."

The bridges were sheer madness, while the river flowing underneath seemed chock-a-block with corpses. It took our party two hours to fight our

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way against the stream of panicky human refugees, before the makeshift expedition finally arrived close enough to make out how the dance progressed.

"They are closer, are they not?" I asked the lieutenant assigned to guide us. "Have they been spiraling inward at a steady rate?"

The young officer nodded. "*Oui, Monsieur.* It now seems clear that all three are converging on Eiffel's Tower. Though for what reason, and whether it will continue — "

I laughed, remembering the thought that had struck me earlier — a mental image of herons dancing in a swamp. The comparison renewed when I next looked upward in awe at the stomping, whirling gyrations of the mighty battle machines, shattering buildings and making the earth shake with each hammer blow of their mincing feet. Steam hissed from broken mains. Basements and ossuaries collapsed, but the dance went on. Three monstrous things, wheeling ever closer to their chosen goal...which waited quietly, demurely, like a giant metal ingénue.

"Oh, they will converge all right, lieutenant. The question is — shall we be ready when they do?"

My mind churned.

The essential task in envisioning the future is a capacity for wonder. I had said as much to journalists. These Martians lived in a future of technological effects we could but imagine. Only through such visualization could we glimpse their Achilles heel.

Now was the crucial moment when wonder, so long merely encased in idle talk, should spring forth to action.

Wonder...a fine word, but what did it mean? Summoning up an inner eye, which could scale up the present, pregnant with possibility, into...into...

What, then? Hertz, his waves, circuits, capacitors, wires —

Beauchamp glanced nervously around. "Even if you could get the attention of the military — "

"For such tasks the army is useless. I am thinking of something else." I said suddenly, filled with an assurance I could not explain. "The Martians will soon converge at the center of their obsession. And when they do, we shall be ready."

"Ready with what?"

"With what lies within our — " and here I thought of the pun, a glittering word soaring up from the shadowy subconscious " — within our *capacitance.*"

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* * *

The events of that long night compressed for me. I had hit upon the kernel of the idea, but the implementation loomed like an insuperable barrier.

Fortunately, I had not taken into account the skills of other men, especially the great leadership ability of my friend, M. Beauchamp. He had commanded a battalion against the Prussians, dominating his corner of the battlefield without runners. With more like him, Sedan would never have fallen. His voice rose above the streaming crowds, and plucked forth from that torrent those who still had a will to contest the pillage of their city. He pointed to my figure, whom many seemed to know. My heart swelled at the thought that Frenchmen — and Frenchwomen! — would muster to a hasty cause upon the mention of my name, encouraged solely by the thought that I might offer a way to fight back.

I tried to describe my ideas as briskly as possible...but alas, brevity has never been my chief virtue. So I suppressed a flash of pique when the brash American, following the impulsive nature of his race, leaped up and shouted —

"Of course! Verne, you clever old frog. You've got it!"

— and then, in vulgar but concise French, he proceeded to lay it all out in a matter of moments, conveying the practical essentials amid growing excitement from the crowd.

With an excited roar, our makeshift army set at once to work.

I am not a man of many particulars. But craftsmen and workers and simple men of manual dexterity stepped in while engineers, led by the Italian and the American, took charge of the practical details, charging about with the gusto of youth, unstoppable in their enthusiasm. In fevered haste, bands of patriots ripped the zinc sheets from bars. They scavenged the homes of the rich in search of silver. No time to beat it into proper electrodes — they connected decanters and candlesticks into makeshift assortments. These they linked with copper wires, fetched from the cabling of the new electrical tramways.

The electropotentials of the silver with the copper, in the proper conducting medium, would be monstrously reminiscent of the original "voltaic" pile of Alessandro Volta. In such a battery, shape does not matter so much as surface area, and proper wiring. Working through the smoky night, teams took these rude pieces and made a miracle of rare design. The

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metals they immersed in a salty solution, emptying the wine vats of the district to make room, spilling the streets red, and giving any true Frenchman even greater cause to think only of vengeance!

These impromptu batteries, duplicated throughout the *arrondissement*, the quick engineers soon webbed together in a vast parallel circuit. Amid the preparations, M. Beauchamp and the English scientist inquired into my underlying logic.

"Consider the simple equations of planetary motion," I said. "Even though shot from the Martian surface with great speed, the time to reach Earth must be many months, perhaps a year."

"One can endure space for such a time?" Beauchamp frowned.

"Space, yes. It is mere vacuum. Tanks of their air — thin stuff, Professor Lowell assures us from his observations — could sustain them. But think! These Martians, they must have intelligence of our rank. They left their kind to venture forth and do battle. Several years without the comforts of home, until they have subdued our world and can send for more of their kind."

The Englishman seemed perplexed. "For more?"

"Specifically, for their families, their mates...dare I say their *wives*? Though it would seem that not *all* were left behind. At least one came along in the first wave, out of need for her expertise, perhaps, or possibly she was smuggled along, on the ill-fated missile that our forces captured."

Beauchamp bellowed. "Zut! The four-legged one. There are reports of no others. You are right, Verne. It must be rare to bring one of that kind so close to battle!"

The Englishman shook his head. "Even if this is so, I do not follow how it applies to this situation." He gestured toward where the three terrible machines were nearing the tower, their gyrations now tight, their dance more languorous. Carefully, reverentially, yet with a clear longing, they reached out to the great spire that Paris had almost voted to tear down, just a few years after the Grand Exhibition ended. Now all our hopes were founded in the city's wise decision to let M. Eiffel's masterpiece stand.

The Martians stroked its base, clasped the thick parts of the tower's curving thigh — and commenced slowly to climb.

Beauchamp smirked at the English scholar, perhaps with a light touch of malice. "I expect you would not understand, sir. It is not in your national character to fathom this, ah, ritual."

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"Humph!" Unwisely, the Englishman used Beauchamp's teasing as cause to take offense. "I'll wager that *we* give these Martians a whipping before your lot does!"

"Ah yes," Beauchamp remarked. "Whipping is more along the lines of the English, I believe."

With a glance, I chided my dear friend. After all, our work was now done. The young, the skilled, and the brave had the task well in hand. Like generals who have unleashed their regiments beyond recall, we had only to observe, awaiting either triumph or blame.

At dawn, an array of dozens and dozens of Volta batteries lay scattered across the south bank of the Seine. Some fell prey to rampages by smaller Martian machines, while others melted under hasty application of fuming acids. Cabling wound through streets where buildings burned and women wept. Despite all obstacles of flame, rubble, and burning rays, all now terminated at Eiffel's tower.

The Martians' ardent climb grew manifestly amorous as the sun rose in piercing brilliance, warming our chilled bones. I was near the end of my endurance, sustained only by the excitement of observing Frenchmen and women fighting back with ingenuity and rare unity. But as the Martians scaled the tower — driven by urges we can guess by analogy alone — I began to doubt. My scheme was simple, but could it work?

I conferred with the dark Italian who supervised the connections.

"Potentials? Voltages?" He screwed up his face. "Who has had-a time to calculate. All I know, M'sewer, iz that we got-a plenty juice. You want-a fry a fish, use a hot flame."

I took his point. Even at comparatively low voltages, high currents can destroy any organism. A mere fraction of an Ampere can kill a man, if his skin is made a reasonable conductor by application of water, for example. Thus, we took it as a sign of a higher power at work, when the bright sun fell behind a glowering black cloud, and an early mist rolled in from the north. It made the tower slick beneath the orange lamps we had festooned about it.

And still the Martians climbed.

It was necessary to coordinate the discharge of so many batteries in one powerful jolt, a mustering of beta rays. Pyrotechnicians had taken up positions beside our command post, within sight of the giant, spectral figures which now had mounted a third of the way up the tower.

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"Hey Verne!" The American shouted, with well-meant impudence. "You're on!"

I turned to see that a crowd had gathered. Their expressions of tense hope touched this old man's heart. Hope and faith in my idea. There would be no higher point in the life of a fabulist.

"Connect!" I cried. "Loose the hounds of electrodynamics!"

A skyrocket leaped forth, trailing sooty smoke — a makeshift signal, but sufficient.

Down by the river and underneath a hundred ruins, scores of gaps and switches closed. Capacitors arced. A crackling rose from around the city as stored energy rushed along the copper cabling. I imagined for an instant the onrushing mob of beta rays, converging on —

The invaders suddenly shuddered, and soon there emerged thin, high cries, screams that were the first sign of how much like us they were, for their wails rose in hopeless agony, shrieks of despair from mouths which breathed lighter air than we, but knew the same depths of woe.

They toppled one by one, tumbling in the morning mist, crashing to shatter on the trampled lawns and cobblestones of the ironically named *Champ-de-Mars*...marshaling ground of the god of war, and now graveyard of his planetary champions.

The lesser machines, deprived of guidance, soon reeled away, some falling into the river, and many others destroyed by artillery, or even enraged mobs. So the threat ebbed from its horrid peak...at least for the time being.

As my reward for these services, I would ask that the site be renamed, for it was not the arts of *battle* which turned the metal monsters into burning slag. Nor even Zeus's lightning, which we had unleashed. In the final analysis, it was *Aphrodite* who had come to the aid of her favorite city.

What a fitting way for our uninvited guests to meet their end — to die passionately in Paris, from a fatal love.

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New York Times *best selling writer Dave Wolverton made quite a splash when he first appeared on the science fiction scene. His short story, "On My Way to Paradise," won the Grand Prize of the Writers of the Future contest. The story became a novel, and Dave went on to become the preliminary judge for the contest. Since the story appeared, Dave has primarily concentrated on novels. In addition to writing the most romantic Star Wars novel,* The Courtship of Princess Leia, *for Bantam Books, Dave has written a series of other novels. Tor Books published his most recent books,* The Golden Queen *and* Beyond the Gate, *and will soon publish his next,* Lords of the Seventh Swarm.

"After a Lean Winter," our final Martian story, shows that Dave is still a master of the short form.

After a Lean Winter

By Dave Wolverton

PIERRE SWEPT INTO HIDDEN Lodge on Titchen Creek late on a moonless night. His two sled dogs huffed and bunched their shoulders, then dug their back legs in with angry growls, hating the trail, as they crossed that last stubborn rise. The runners of his sled rang over the crusted snow with the sound of a sword being drawn from its scabbard, and the leather harnesses creaked.

The air that night had a feral bite to it. The sun had been down for days, sometimes hovering near the horizon, and the deadly winter chill was on. It would be a month before we'd see the sun again. For weeks we had felt that cold air gnawing us, chewing away at our vitality, like a wolf pup worrying a shard of caribou bone long after the marrow is depleted.

In the distance, billowing thunderclouds raced toward us under the glimmering stars, promising some insulating warmth. A storm was chasing Pierre's trail. By agreement, no one came to the lodge until just before a storm, and none stayed long after the storm began.

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Pierre's two poor huskies caught the scent of camp and yipped softly. Pierre called "Gee," and the sled heeled over on a single runner. Carefully, he twisted the gee-poles, laid the sled on its side next to a dozen others. I noted a heavy bundle lashed to the sled, perhaps a moose haunch, and I licked my lips involuntarily. I'd pay well for some meat.

From out under the trees, the other pack dogs sniffed and approached, too tired to growl or threaten. One of Pierre's huskies yapped again, and Pierre leapt forward with a dog-whip, threatening the lean beast until it fell silent. We did not tolerate noise from dogs anymore. Many a man would have pulled a knife and gutted that dog where it stood, but Pierre — a very crafty and once-prosperous trapper — was down to only two dogs.

"S'okay," I said from my watch post, putting him at ease. "No Martians about." Indeed, the frozen tundra before me was barren for miles. In the distance was a meandering line of wizened spruce, black in the starlight, and a few scraggly willows poked through the snow along the banks of a winding frozen river just below the lodge. The distant mountains were dark red with lush new growth of Martian foliage. But mostly the land was snow-covered tundra. No Martian ships floated cloudlike over the snowfields. Pierre glanced up toward me, unable to make out my form.

"Jacques? Jacques Lowndunn? Dat you?" he called, his voice muffled by the wolverine-fur trim of his parka. "What news, my iren'? Eh?"

"No one's had sight of the bloody-minded Martians in two weeks," I said. "They cleared out of Juneau."

There had been a brutal raid on the town of Dawson some weeks before, and the Martians had captured the whole town, harvesting the unlucky inhabitants for their blood. We'd thought then that the Martians were working their way north, that they'd blaze a path to Titchen Creek. We could hardly go much farther north this time of year. Even if we could drag along enough food to feed ourselves, the Martians would just follow our trail in the snow. So we dug in, holed up for the winter.

"Ah 'ave seen de Marshawns. Certayne!" Pierre said in his nasal voice, hunching his shoulders. He left the dogs in their harness but fed them each a handful of smoked salmon. I was eager to hear his news, but he made me wait. He grabbed his rifle from its scabbard, for no one would walk about unarmed, then forged up toward the lodge, plodding toward me through the crusted snow, floundering deeper and deeper into the drifts with every step,

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until he climbed up on the porch. There was no friendly light behind me to guide his steps. Such a light would have shown us up to the Martians.

"Where did you spot them?" I asked.

"Anchorawge," he grunted, stamping his feet and brushing snow out of his parka before entering the warmer lodge. "De citee ees gone, Jacques — dead. De Martians keel everybawdy, by gar!" He spat in the snow. "De Martians es dere!"

Only once had I ever had the misfortune of observing a Martian. It was when Bessie and I were on the steamer up from San Francisco. We'd sailed to Puget Sound, and in Seattle we almost put to port. But the Martians had landed, and we saw one of their warriors wearing a metal body that gleamed sullenly like polished brass. It stood watch, its curved protective armor stretching above its head like the chitinous shell of a crab, its lank, tripod metal legs letting it stand gracefully a hundred feet in the air. At first, one would have thought it an inanimate tower, but it twisted ever so insignificantly as we moved closer, regarding us as a jumping spider will a gnat, just before it pounces. We notified the captain, and he kept sailing north, leaving the Martian to hunt on its lonely stretch of beach, gleaming in the afternoon sun.

Bessie and I had thought then that we would be safe back in the Yukon. I cannot imagine any other place than the land near the Circle that is quite so relentlessly inhospitable to life, yet I am intimate with the petty moods of this land, which I have always viewed as something of a mean-spirited accountant which requires every beast upon it to pay his exact dues each year, or die. I had not thought the Martians would be able to survive here, so Bessie and I took our few possessions and struck out from the haven of San Francisco for the bitter wastes north of Juneau. We were so naive.

If the Martians were in Anchorage, then Pierre's tidings were mixed. It was good that they were hundreds of miles away, bad that they were still alive at all. In warmer climes, it was said, they died quickly from bacterial infections. But that was not true here by the Circle. The Martians were thriving in our frozen wastes. Their crops grew at a tremendous rate on any patch of frozen windswept ground — in spite of the fact that there was damned little light. Apparently, Mars is a world that is colder and darker than ours, and what is for us an intolerable frozen hell is to them a balmy paradise.

Pierre finished stamping off his shoes and lifted the latch to the door. Nearly everyone had already made it to our conclave. Simmons, Coldwell and

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Porter hadn't shown, and it was growing so late that I didn't anticipate that they would make it this time. They were busy with other affairs, or the Martians had harvested them.

I was eager to hear Pierre's full account, so I followed him into the lodge.

In more congenial days, we would have had the iron stove crackling merrily to warm the place. But we couldn't risk such a comforting blaze now. Only a meager lamp consigned to the floor furnished any light for the room. Around the lodge, bundled in bulky furs in their unceasing struggle to get warm, were two dozen stolid men and women of the north. Though the unending torments of the past months had left them bent and bleak, there was a cordial atmosphere now that we had all gathered. A special batch of hootch warmed on a tripod above the lamp. Everyone rousted a bit when Pierre came through the door, edging away enough to make room for him near the lamp.

"What news?" One-Eyed Kate called before Pierre could even kneel by the lamp and pull off his mittens with his teeth. He put his hands down to toast by the glass of the lamp.

Pierre didn't speak. It must have been eighty below outside, and his jaw was leather-stiff from the cold. His lips were tinged with blue, and ice crystals lodged in his brows, eyelashes, and beard.

Still, we all hung on expectantly for a word of news. Then I saw his mood. He didn't like most of the people in this room, though he had a warm spot in his heart for me. Pierre had Indian blood on his mother's side, and he saw this as a chance to count coup on the others. He'd make them pay for every word he uttered. He grunted, nodded toward the kettle of hootch on the tripod.

One-Eyed Kate herself dipped in a battered tin mug, handed it to him. Still he didn't utter a word. He'd been nursing a grudge for the past two months. Pierre Jelenc was a trapper of almost legendary repute here in the north, a tough and cunning man. Some folks down at the Hudson Bay Company said he'd devoted a huge portion of his grub stake to new traps last spring. The north had had two soft winters in a row, so the trapping promised to be exceptional — the best in forty years.

Then the Martians had come, making it impossible for a man to run his trap lines. So while the miners toiled in their shafts through the dark winter, getting wealthier by the minute, Pierre had a lost a year's grub stake, and now all of his traps were scattered in their line, hundreds of miles across the

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territory. Even Pierre, with his keen mind, wouldn't be able to find most of those traps next spring.

Two months ago, Pierre had made one desperate attempt to recoup his losses here at Hidden Lodge. In a drunken frenzy, he started fighting his sled dogs in the big pit out behind the lodge. But his dogs hadn't been eating well, so he couldn't milk any fight out of them. Five of his huskies got slaughtered in the pit that night. Afterward, Pierre had left in a black rage, and hadn't attended a conclave since.

Pierre downed the mug of hootch. It was a devil's concoction of brandy, whiskey, and hot peppers. He handed the cup back to One-Eyed Kate for a refill.

Evidently, Doctor Weatherby had been reading from an article in a newspaper — a paper nearly three months old out of southern Alberta.

"I say, right then," Doctor Weatherby said in a chipper tone. Apparently he thought that Pierre had no news, and I was of a mind to let Pierre speak when he desired. I listened intently, for it was the Doctor I had come to see, hoping he would be able to help my Bessie. "As I reported, Doctor Silvena in Edmonton thinks that there may be more than the cold at work here to help keep the Martians alive. He notes that the 'thin and rarefied air here in the north is more beneficial to the lungs than air in the south, which is clogged with myriad pollens and unhealthy germs. Moreover,' he states, 'there seems to be some quality to the light here in the far north that causes it to destroy detrimental germs. We in the north are marvelously free of many plagues found in warmer lands — leprosy, elephantiasis, and such. Even typhoid and diphtheria are seldom seen here, and the terrible fevers which rampage warmer climes are almost unknown among our native Inuit.' He goes on to say that, 'Contrary to speculation that the Martians here will expire in the summer when germs are given to reproduce more fervently, it may be that the Martian will hold forth on our northern frontier indefinitely. Indeed, they may gradually acclimatize themselves to our air, and, like the Indians who have grown resistant to our European measles and chicken pox, in time they may once again venture into more temperate zones.'"

"Not a'fore bears grow wings," Klondike Pete Kandinsky hooted. "It's cold enough to freeze the balls off a pool table out thar this winter. Most like, we'll find them Martians all laid out next spring, thawing in some snowbank."

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Klondike Pete was behind the times. Rumor said that he'd struck a rich vein in his gold mine, so he'd holed up in the shaft, working eighteen-hour days from August through Christmas, barely taking time to come out for supplies. He hadn't attended our previous conclaves.

"Gads," Doctor Weatherby said, "I say, where have you been? We believe that the Martians came here because their own world has been cooling for millennia. They're seeking our warmer climes. But just because they are looking for warmer weather, it doesn't mean they want to live on our equator! What seems monstrously cold to us — that biting winter that we've suffered through this past three months — is positively balmy on Mars! I'm sure they're much invigorated by it. Indeed, the reason we haven't seen more of the Martians here in the past weeks seems blatantly obvious: they're preparing to migrate north, to our polar cap!"

"Ah, Gods, I swear!" Klondike Pete shook his head mournfully, realizing our predicament for the first time. "Why don't the Army do somethin? Teddy Roosevelt or the Mounties ought to do somethin."

"They're playing at waiting," One-Eyed Kate grumbled. "You know what kinds of horrors they've been through down south. There's not much the armies of the world can do against the Martians. Even if they could send heavy artillery against the Martians in the winter, there's no sense in it — not when the varmints might die out this coming spring, anyhow."

"There's sense 'n it!" one old timer said. "Folks is dyin' up here! The Martians squeeze us for blood, then toss our carcasses 'way like grape skins!"

"Yeah," One-Eyed Kate said, "and so long as it's the likes of you and me that are doing the dying, Tom King, no one will do more than yawn about it!"

The refugees in the room looked around gloomily at one another. Trappers, miners, Indians, crackpots who'd fled from the world. We were an unsavory lot, dressed in our hides, with sour bear grease rubbed in our skin to keep out the weather. One-Eyed Kate was right. No one would rescue us.

"I just whist we 'ad word on them Martians," old Tom King said, wiping his nose on the sleeve of his parka. He looked off into a corner with rheumy eyes. "No news is good news," he intoned, the hollow-sounding supplication of an atheist.

None of us believed the adage. The Martian vehicles that fell in the southern climes were filled only with a few armies and scouts. Thirty or forty troops per vehicle, if we judged right. But now we saw that these were only the advance forces, hardly more than scouts who were meant, perhaps, to decimate our armies and harass the greater population of the world in

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preparation for the most massive vehicle, the one that fell two months later than the rest, just south of Juneau. The mother ship had carried two thousand Martians, some guessed, along with their weird herds of humanoid bipeds that the Martians harvested for blood. The mother vehicle had hardly settled when thousands of their slaves swarmed out of the ships and began planting crops, scattering otherworldly seeds that sprouted nearly overnight into grotesque forests of twisted growths that looked like coral or cactuses, but which Doctor Weatherby assured us were more likely some type of fungus. Certain of the plants grew two hundred yards high in the ensuing month, so that it was said that now, one could hardly travel south of Juneau in most places. The "Great Northern Martian Jungle" formed a virtually impenetrable barrier to the southlands, a barrier reputed to harbor Martian bipeds who hunted humans so that their masters might feast on our blood.

"If no news is good news, then let us toast good news," Klondike Pete said, hoisting his mug.

"Ah've seen dem Marshawns," Pierre said at last. "En Anchorawge. Dey burned de ceety, by *Gar*, and dey are building, building — making new ceety dat is strange and wondrous!"

There were cries of horror and astonishment, people crying out queries. "When, when did you see them?" Doctor Weatherby asked, shouting to be heard above the others.

"Twelve days now," Pierre said. "Dere is a jungle growing around Anchorawge now — very thick — and de Marshawns live dere, smelting de ore day and night to build dere machine ceety. Dere ceety — how shall I say? — is magnificent, by *Gar!* Eet stands five hundred feet tall, and can walk about on eets three legs like a walking stool. But is not a small stool — is huge, by *Gar*, a mile across!

"On de top of de table, is huge glass bowl, alive with shimmering work-lights, more varied and magnificent dan de lights of Paris! And under dis dome, de Marshawns building dere home."

Doctor Weatherby's eyes opened wide in astonishment. "A dome, you say? Fantastic! Are they sealing themselves in? Could it keep out bacteria?"

Pierre shrugged. "Ah 'uz too far away to see dis taim. Some taim, maybe, Ah go back — look more closer. Eh?"

"Horse feathers!" Klondike Pete said. "Them Martians couldn't raise such a huge city in two months. Frenchie, I don't like it when some pimple like you pulls my legs!"

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There was an expectant hush around the room, and none dared intervene between the two men. I think that most of us at least half believed Pierre. No one knew what the Martians were capable of. They flew between worlds and built killing death rays. They switched mechanical bodies as easily as we changed clothes. We could not guess their limitations.

Only Klondike Pete here was ignorant enough to doubt the Frenchman. Pierre scowled up at Pete. The little Frenchman was not used to having someone call him a liar, and many honest men so accused would have pulled a knife to defend their honor. A fight was almost expected, but in any physical contest, Pierre would not equal Klondike Pete.

But Pierre obviously had another plan in mind. A secretive smile stole across his face, and I imagined how he might be plotting to ambush the bigger man on some dark night, steal his gold. So many men had been taken by the Martians, that in such a scenario, we would likely never learn the truth of it.

But that was not Pierre's plan. He downed another mug of hootch, banged his empty mug on the lid of the cold iron stove at his side. Almost as if magically summoned, a blast of wind struck the lodge, whistling through the eaves of the log cabin. I'd been vaguely aware of the rising wind for the past few minutes, but only then did I recognize that the full storm had just hit.

By custom, when a storm hit we would set a roaring blaze and lavish upon ourselves one or two hours of warmth before trudging back to our own cabins or mine shafts. If we timed it properly, the last of the storm would blanket our trail, concealing our passage from any Martians that might fly over, hunting us.

Still, some of us were clumsy. Over the past three months, our numbers had been steadily diminishing, our people disappearing as the Martians harvested us.

My thoughts turned homeward, to my own wife Bessie who was huddled in our cabin, sick and weakened by the interminable cold.

"Storm's here, stoke up the fire!" someone shouted, and One-Eyed Kate opened the iron door to the old stove and struck a match. The tinder had already been set, perhaps for days, in anticipation of this moment.

Soon a roaring blaze crackled in the old iron stove. We huddled in a circle, each of us silent and grateful, grunting with satisfaction. During the storms, the Martian flying machines were forced to seek shelter in secluded valleys, it was said, and so we did not fear that the Martians would attack. The bipeds that the Martians used for food and as slaves might attack, I suspected, if they

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saw our smoke, but this was unlikely. We were far from the Martian Jungles, and it was rumored that the bipeds held forth only in their own familiar domain.

After the past two weeks of damnable cold, we needed some warmth, and as I basked in the roaring heat of the stove, the others began to sigh in contentment. I hoped that Bessie had lit our own little stove back in the old mining shack we called home.

Pierre put his gloves back on, and the little man was beginning to feel the effects of his drinks. He weaved a little as he stood, and growled, "By *Gar*, your dogs weel fait mah beast tonait!"

"You're down to only two dogs," I reminded Pierre. He wasn't a careless sort, unless he got drunk. I knew he wasn't thinking clearly. He couldn't afford to lose another dog in a senseless fight.

"Damn you, Jacques! Your dogs weel fait mah beast tonait!" He pounded the red-hot stove with a gloved fist, staggered toward me with a crazed gleam in his eyes.

I wanted to protect him from himself. "No one wants to fight your dogs tonight," I said.

Pierre staggered to me, grabbed my shoulder with both hands, and looked up. His face was seamed and scarred by the cold, and though he was drunk, there was a cunning glint in his eyes. "Your dogs, weel fait, my *beast*, tonait!"

The room went silent. "What beast are you talking about?" One-Eyed Kate said.

"You looking for Marshawns, no?" he turned to her and waved expansively. "You want see a Marshawn? Your dogs keeled mah dogs. Now your dogs weel fait mah Marshawn!"

My heart began pounding, and my thoughts raced. We had not seen Pierre in weeks, and it was said that he was one of the finest trappers in the Yukon. As my mind registered what he'd brought back from Anchorage, as I realized what he'd trapped there, I recalled the heavy bundle tied to his sled. Could he really have secured a live Martian?

Suddenly there was shouting in the room from a dozen voices. Several men grabbed a lantern and dashed out the front door, the dancing light throwing grotesque images on the wall. Klondike Pete was shouting, "How much? How much do you want to fight your beast?"

"I say, heaven forbid! Let's not have a fight!" Doctor Weatherby began saying. "I want to study the creature!"

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But the sudden fury with which the others met the doctor's plea was overwhelming.

We were outraged by the Martians for our burnt cities, for the poisoned crops, for the soldiers who died under Martian heat beams or choked to death in the vile Black Fog that emanated from their guns. More than all of this, we raged against the Martians for our fair daughters and children who had gone to feed these vile beasts, these Martians who drank our blood as we drain water.

So great was this primal rage, that someone struck the doctor — more in some mindless animal instinct, some basic need to see the Martian dead, than out of anger at the good man who had worked so hard to keep us alive through this hellish winter.

The doctor crumpled under the weight of the blow and knelt on the floor for a moment, staring down at the dirty wood planks, trying to regain his senses.

Meanwhile, others took up the shout, "There's a game for you!" "How much to fight it? What do you want?"

Pierre stood in a swirling, writhing, shouting maelstrom. I know logically that there could not have been two dozen people in the room, yet it seemed like vastly more. Indeed, it seemed to my mind that all of troubled humanity crowded the room at that moment, hurling fists in the air, cursing, threatening, mindlessly crying for blood.

I found myself screaming to be heard, "How much? How much?" And though I have never been one to engage in the savage sport of dogfighting, I thought of my own sled dogs out in front of the lodge, and I considered how much I'd be willing to pay to watch them tear apart a Martian. The answer was simple:

I'd pay everything I owned.

Pierre raised his hands in the air for silence, and named his price, and if you think it unfairly high, then remember this: we all secretly believed that we would die before spring. Money meant almost nothing to us. Most of us had been unable to get adequately outfitted for winter, and had hoped that a moose or a caribou would get us through the lean months. But Martians harvested the caribou and moose just as they harvested us. Many a man in that room knew that he'd be down to eating his sled dogs by spring. Money means nothing to those who wish only to survive.

Yet we knew that many would profit from the Martian invasion. In the south, insurance hucksters were selling policies against future invasions, the loggers and financiers were making fortunes, and every man who'd ever

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handled a hammer suddenly called himself a master carpenter and sought to hire himself out at inflated prices.

We in this room did not resent Pierre's desire to recoup his losses after this most horrible of winters.

"De beast has sixteen tentacles," he said, "so Ah weel let you fight heem with eight dogs — at five t'ousand doughlars a dog: Two t'ousand doughlars for me, and de rest, goes for de winner, or de winners, of de fait!"

The accounts we'd read about Martians suggested that without their metallic bodies, they moved ponderously slow here on Earth. The increased gravity of our world, where everything is three times heavier than on Mars, weighed them down greatly. I'd never seen a bear pitted against more than eight dogs, so it seemed unlikely that the Martian could win. But with each contestant putting in two thousand dollars just for the right to fight, Pierre would go home with at least $16,000 — five times what he'd make in a good year. All he had to do was let people pay for the right to kill a Martian.

Klondike Pete didn't even blink. "I'll put in two huskies!" he roared.

"Grip can take him!" One-Eyed Kate said. "You'll let a pit bull fight?"

Pierre nodded, and I began calculating. If you counted most of my supplies, I had barely enough for a stake in the fight, and I had a dog I thought could win — half husky, half wolfhound. He'd outweigh any of the other mutts in the pit, and he pulled the sled with great heart. He was a natural leader.

But I caught that sly gleam in Pierre's dark eyes. I knew that this fight would be more than any of us were bargaining for. I hesitated.

"By Gol', I'll put in my fighter," old Tom King offered with evident bloodlust, and in half a moment four other men signed their notes to Pierre. The fight was set.

THE STORM RAGED. Snow pounded in unbounded avarice, skirling across the frozen crust of the winter's buildup. One-Eyed Kate lugged a pair of lanterns into the blizzard, held them over the fighting pit. At the north end, a bear cage could be lowered into the pit by means of a winch. At the south end, a dog run led down.

Klondike Pete leapt in and flattened the snow, then climbed back up through the dog run. Everyone unhitched and brought their dogs from the sleds, then herded them down the run. The dogs smelled the excitement,

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yapped and growled, stalking through the pit and sniffing uneasily.

Someone began winching the big cage up, and the dogs settled down. Some of the dogs had battled bears, and so knew the sound of the winch. One-Eyed Kate's pit bull emitted a coughing bark and began leaping in excitement, wanting to draw first blood from whatever we loosed into the pit.

It was a ghoulish mob that stood around that dark pit, pale faces lit dimly by the oily lanterns that flickered and guttered with every gust of wind.

Four men had already lugged Pierre's bundle around to the back of the lodge. The bundle was wrapped in heavy canvas and tied solidly with five or six hide ropes of Eskimo make. A couple of men worried at the knots, trying to untie the frozen leather, while two others stood nearby with rifles cocked, aimed at the bundle.

Pierre swore softly, drew his Bowie knife and sliced through the ropes, then rolled the canvas over several times. The canvas was wound tight around the Martian six turns, so that one moment I was peering through the driving snow while trying to make out the form that would emerge from the gray bundle, and the next moment, the Martian fell on the ground before us.

It burst out from the tarpaulin. It backed away from Pierre and from the light, a creature frightened and alone, and for several moments it made a metallic hissing noise as it slithered over the snow, searching for escape. At first, the hissing sounded like a rattlesnake's warning, and several of us leapt back. But the creature before us was no snake.

For those who have never seen a Martian, it can be difficult to describe such a monstrosity. I have read descriptions, but none succeed. My recollections of this monster are imprinted as solidly as if they were etched on a lithographic plate, for this creature was both more than, and less than, the sum of all our nightmares.

Others have described the fungal green-gray hue of the creature's bulbous head, fully five times larger than a human head, and they have told of the wet leathery skin that encases the Martian's enormous brain. Others have described the peculiar slavering, sucking sounds that the creatures made as they gasped for breath, heaving convulsively as they groped about in our heavy atmosphere.

Others have described the two clumps of tentacles — eight in each clump, just below the lipless V-shaped beak, and they have told how the Gorgon tentacles coiled almost languidly as the creature slithered about.

The Martian invites comparison to the octopus or squid, for like these creatures, it seems little more than a head with tentacles. Yet it is so much more than that!

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No one has described how the Martian was so exquisitely, so gloriously alive. The one Pierre had captured swayed back and forth, pulsing across the ice-crusted snow with an ease that suggested that it was acclimated to polar conditions. While others have said that the creature seemed to them to be ponderously slow, I wonder if their specimens were not somehow hampered by warmer conditions — for this beast wriggled viciously, and its tentacles slithered over the snow like living whips, writhing not in agony — but in desperation, in a curious hunger.

Others have tried to tell what they saw in the Martian's huge eyes: a marvelous intelligence, an intellect keen beyond measure, a sense of malevolence that some imagined to be pure evil.

Yet as I looked into that monster's eyes, I saw all of those and more. The monster slithered over the snow at a deceptively quick pace, circling and twisting this way and that. Then for a moment it stopped and candidly studied each of us. In its eyes was an undisguised hunger, a malevolent intent so monstrous that some hardened trappers cried out and turned away.

A dozen men pulled out weapons and hardly restrained themselves from opening fire. For a moment the Martian continued to hiss in that metallic grating sound, and I imagined it was some warning, till I realized that it was only the sound of the creature drawing crude breaths.

It sized up the situation, then sat gazing with evident maleficence at Pierre. The only sound was the gusting of wind over the tundra, the hiss of frozen snow stinging the ground, and my heart pounding.

Pierre laughed gleefully. "You see de situation, mah frien'," he addressed the Martian. "You wan' to drink from me, but we have de guns trained on *you*. But dere ees blood to drink — blood from dogs!"

The Martian gazed at Pierre with calculating hatred. I do not doubt it understood every word Pierre uttered, every nuance. I imagined the creature learning our tongue as Pierre talked to it and his dogs on the lonely trail. It knew what we required of it. "Keel dem if you can," Pierre admonished the creature. "Keel de dogs, drink from dem. If you ween, Ah weel set you free to fin' your own kind. Ees simple, no?"

The Martian expelled some air from its mouth in a gasp, an almost mechanical sound that cannot adequately be described as speech. Yet the timing of that gasp, the pitch and volume, identified the beast's intent as certain as any words uttered from human lips. "Yes," it said.

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Haltingly, with many a backward glance at us, the Martian slithered over the ground on its tentacles, entered the bear cage. Klondike Pete went to the winch and lifted the cage from the ground, while Tom King swiveled the boom out over the floor of the pit, then they lowered the cage.

The dogs sniffed and yapped. Snarls and growls mingled into a continuous sound. One-Eyed Kate's pit bull, Grip, was a grayish creature the color of ash, and it leapt up at the cage as it lowered, growling and snapping once or twice, then caught the alien's scent and backed away.

Others were not so circumspect. Klondike Pete's dogs were veterans of the ring, used to fighting as a team, and their teeth snapped together with metallic clicks as we lowered the Martian into the pit. They jumped up, biting at the tentacles that recoiled from them.

When the cage hit the floor of the pit, Klondike Pete's huskies snarled and danced forward, thrusting their teeth between the pine-wood bars at each side of the bear cage, trying to tear some flesh from the Martian before we pulled the rope that would open the door, freeing the Martian into the ring.

The dogs attacked from two sides at once, and if it had been a bear in that cage, it would have backed away from one dog, only to have the other tear into it from behind. The Martian was not so easily abused.

It held calmly in the center of the cage for half a second, observing the dogs with those huge eyes, so full of malevolent wisdom.

Klondike Pete pulled the rope that would spring the door to the cage, releasing the Martian to the pack of dogs, and what happened next is almost too grisly to tell.

It has been said that Martians were ponderously slow, that they struggled under the effects of our heavier gravity. Perhaps that was true of them when they first landed, but this creature seemed to have acclimated to our gravity very well over the past few months.

It became, in an instant, a seething dynamo, a twisting, grisly mass of flesh bent on destruction. It hurled against one side of the cage, then another, and at first I believed it was trying to demolish the cage, break it asunder. Indeed, the Martian was roughly the size and weight of a small black bear, and I have seen bears tear cages apart in a fight. I heard timbers crack under the monster's onslaught, but it was not trying to break the bars of its cage.

It was not until after the Martian had hurled itself against the bars of its cage that I realized what had happened. Each of a Martian's tentacles is seven

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feet long, and about three inches wide near the end. With several tentacles whipping snake-like in the air, striking in precision, the Martian had snatched through the bars and grabbed one husky, then another, and pulled, pinning the dogs helplessly against the sides of the bear cage where it held them firmly about their necks.

The huskies yelped and whined to find themselves in the Martian's grasp, and struggled to pull away, desperately scratching at the beast's tentacles with their forepaws, tugging backward with their considerable might. These were not your weak house dogs of New York or San Francisco. These were trained pack dogs that could drag a four hundred pound sled over the bitter tundra for sixteen hours a day, and I believed that they would easily break free of the Martian's grasp.

The door to the cage began to drop open, and with one tentacle, the Martian grasped it, twined the tentacle about the door, and held it closed as securely as if it were held by a steel lock, and in this manner it kept the other dogs somewhat at bay.

The other dogs barked and snarled. The pit bull lunged and experimentally nipped the tentacle that held the door closed, then danced back. One or two dogs howled, trotted around the pit, unsure how to proceed in their attacks. The pit bull struck again — once, twice — and was joined quickly by the others, and in a moment three dogs were snarling, trying to rip that one tentacle free of the door. I saw flesh ripped away, and tender white skin, almost bloodless, was exposed.

The Martian seemed unconcerned. It was willing to sacrifice a limb in order to sate its appetite. Holding the two huskies firmly against the cage, the Martian began to feed.

It must be remembered that Pierre had held this Martian for nine days without food, and any human so ill-treated perhaps would also have sought refreshment before continuing the fight. It has also been reported that Martians drink blood, and that they used pipettes about a yard long to do so. From other accounts, one might suppose that such pipettes were metallic things that the Martians kept lying about near their vehicles, but this is not so.

Instead, from the Martian's beak, a three-foot long rod telescoped, a rod that might have been a long white bone, except that it was twisted, like the horn of a narwhal, and its tip was hollow.

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The Martian expertly inserted this bone into the jugular vein of the nearest husky, who yelped and snarled ferociously, trying to escape.

A loud, orgasmic slurping issued from the Martian, as if it were drinking sarsaparilla with an enormous straw. The dog's death was amazingly swift. One moment it was kicking its hind legs convulsively, bloodying the snow at its feet in its struggles to escape, and in the next it succumbed totally, horribly, and it slumped and quivered.

The tiniest fleck of blood dribbled from the husky's throat as it ceased its frantic attempts at flight.

In thirty seconds, the feeding over, the Martian twisted with a snapping motion, inserted its horn into the second husky, and drank its blood swiftly. The whole process was carried out with horrid rapidness and precision, with as little thought as you or I might give to the process of chewing and swallowing an apple.

By now, the other dogs had gotten a good portion of the flesh on the Martian's tentacle chewed away, and as the Martian fed upon the second of Klondike Pete's prize-fighting huskies, the Martian struck with several tentacles, pummeling the dogs on their snouts, frightening them back a pace, where they snarled and leapt back and forth, seeking an opening.

The Martian stopped, regarded Klondike Pete balefully, and tossed the body of a dead second husky a pace toward him. The look in the creature's eyes was chilling — a promise of what would happen to Klondike Pete if the Martian got free.

The Martian exhaled from its long white horn, and droplets of blood sprayed out over our faces. The sound that this exhalation — this almost automatic cleaning of the horn — made was most unsettling: it sounded as a trumpeting, ululating cry that rang through the night, slicing through the blizzard. It was a mournful sound, infinitely lonely in that dark setting.

At that moment, I felt small and mean to be standing here on the edge of the pit, urging the dogs to finish their business. For their part, the other six dogs backed away and studied the monster quietly, sniffing the air, wondering at this awe-inspiring sound that it made.

A biting gust of wind hit my face, and for the first time during that fight, I realized just how cold I was. The storm was blowing in warmer air. Indeed, I looked forward to the next few days under the cloud cover. But the wind was brutal. It felt as if ice water were running in my veins, and the bitter weather

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drove the breath from me. I hunched against the cold, saw how the dogs quivered with anticipation in the pit, the breath steaming hot from their mouths.

I wanted to turn, rush inside to the warm stove, forget this grisly battle. But I was held by my own bloodlust, by my own quivering excitement.

There were six strong dogs in the ring, dogs bred to a life of toil. They growled and menaced and kept their distance, and the Martian retracted its horn back under that peculiar V-shaped beak, and flung open the doors of the bear cage, surging forward. Its appetite for blood had been sated, and now it was ready for battle.

In a pounding, quivering mass it rolled forward over the ice, staring into the eyes of the dogs. There was a look of undaunted majesty in those eyes, an air of mastery to the creature's movements. "I am king here," it was saying to the dogs. "I am all you aspire to be. You are fit only to be my food."

With a coughing bark, Grip lunged for the Martian, its gray body leaping silent as a spectre over the snow. It jumped in the air, aiming a snapping bite at the Martian's huge eye. I was almost forced to turn away. I did not want to see what happened when that pit bull's monstrous, vise-like jaws bit into that dark flesh of the Martian's eye.

In response, the Martian dropped down and under the dog with incredible speed. It became a whirling dynamo, a vortex, a living force of incredible power. Reaching up with three tentacles, it caught the pit bull by the neck in midair, then twisted and pulled down. There was an awful snapping as the pit bull hit ground, bounced twice. The pit bull slid a few feet over the snow, its neck broken, and lay panting and whining on the ice, unable to get up.

But the huskies were undaunted. These were the cousins to wolves, and their bloodlust, the primal memories passed through generations, overcame their fear. Four more dogs lunged and bit almost simultaneously, undaunted by the spectacle of strangeness and power before them. As they latched onto a tentacle, twisting, trying to rip and tear at the Martian as if it were some young caribou on the tundra, the Martian would convulse, pull its limb back rapidly, drawing each dog into its clutches.

In seconds, the Martian had four vicious, snarling dogs in its grasp, and its tentacles wound about their necks like a hangman's ropes.

There was a flurry of activity, of frantic writhing and lunges on the parts of the dogs. The growls of attack became plaintive yelps of surprise and fear.

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The eager savage cries of battle became only a desperate pawing as the four worthy huskies, these brothers of the wolf, tried to escape.

The Martian gripped with several tentacles to each dog, as a squid might grasp small fishes, and choked the fight and life from the dogs while we oggled in horrid fascination.

Soon the startled yelping, the labored breathing of dogs, the frantic tussle as the huskies sought escape, all became a stillness. Their heaving chests quieted. The wind blew softly through their gray hair.

The Martian sat atop them, slavering from its exertions, heaving and pulsating, glaring up at us.

One dog was left. Old Tom King's husky, a valiant fighter that knew it was outmatched. It paced on the far side of the pit, whimpered up at us in shame. It was too smart to fight this strange monster.

Tom King hobbled over to the dog run, grunted as he lifted the gate that would let his dog escape the pit. Under normal circumstances, this act of mercy would not be allowed in such a fight, but these were anything but normal circumstances. We would not be amused by the senseless death of this one last canine.

Klondike Pete raised his 30-30 Winchester, aimed at the Martian's head, right between its eyes. The Martian stared at us fiercely, without fear. "Kill me," it seemed to say. "It does not matter. I am but one of our kind. We will be back."

"So, mah fren'," Pierre called to the Martian. "You have won your laif. As Ah promis, Ah weel let you go now. But mah companions here," he waved expansively to the rest of us around the pit, "Ah no t'ink weel be so generous, by *Gar*. Mah condolences to you!"

He turned his back on the Martian, and I stared at the indomitable creature in the pit, lit only by the frantic wavering of our oil lamps. The storm was blowing, and the fierce cold gnawed at me, and for one moment, I wondered what it was like on Mars. I imagined the planet cooling over millennia, becoming a frozen hell like this land we had all exiled ourselves to. I imagined a warm house, a warm room, and I thought at how I, like the Martian, would do anything for one hour of heated solace. I would plot, steal, kill. Just as the Martian had done.

Time seemed to stop as Klondike Pete took aim, and I found myself croaking feebly, "Let it live. It won the right!"

Everyone stopped. One-Eyed Kate peered from across the pit. Jim cocked his head and looked at me strangely.

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The Martian turned its monstrously intelligent eyes on me, and gazed, it seemed, into my soul. For once there was no hunger in that gaze, no disconcerting look of malevolence.

What happened next, I cannot explain, for words alone are inadequate to describe the sensation I received. There are those who assume that the Martians communicated through clicking sounds of their beaks, or through the waving of tentacles, but the many witnesses who observed the monsters in life all agree that no such sounds or motions were evident. Indeed, one reporter in London went so far as to suggest that they may have shared thoughts across space, communicating from one mind to another. Such suggestions have met with ridicule in critical circles, but I can only tell what happened to me: I was gazing into the pit, at the Martian, and suddenly it seemed as if a vast intelligence was pouring into my mind. For one brief moment, my thoughts seemed to expand and my intellect seemed to fill the universe, and I beheld a world with red blowing desert sands so strikingly cold that the sensation assaulted me like a physical blow, crumpling me so that I fell down into the snow, curling into a ball. And as I beheld this world, I looked through eyes that were not my own. All of the light was tremendously magnified and shifted toward the red spectrum, so that I beheld the landscape as if on some strange summer evening when the sky shone more redly than normal. I looked out across a horizon that was peculiarly concave, as if I were staring at a world much smaller than ours.

A few red plants sprouted in this frigid waste, but they were stunted things. Martian cities — walking things that traveled through great maze-like canyons as they followed the sun from season to season — were marching in the distance, tantalizing, gleaming. I craved their warmth, the company of my Martian companions. I hungered for warmth, as a starving man might hunger for food in the last moments of life.

And above me, floating like a mote of dust in the sea of space, was the shining planet Earth.

One. We are one, a voice seemed to whisper in my head, and I knew that the Martian, with its superior intellect, had deigned speak to me. *You understand me. We are one.*

Then above me — for I had fallen to the ground under the weight of this extraordinary vision — a rifle cracked, the sound of it reverberating from the cabin and the low hills. Klondike Pete cocked the gun and fired three more

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times, and the stinging scent of gunpowder and burnt oil from the barrel of his gun filled the air.

I got up and looked into the pit at the Martian. It was wriggling in its death throes, twisting and heaving on the ground in its inhuman way.

Everyone stood in the freezing, pelting snow, watching it die. I looked behind me, and even Doctor Weatherby had come out to witness the monster's demise.

"Right then, I say," he muttered. "Well, it's done."

I got up, brushed the snow from me, and looked down into the pit. Tom King was watching me with rheumy eyes that glittered in the lamplight. He pulled at his beard and cackled. "'Let 't live,' says he!" He turned away and chuckled under his breath. "Young whippersnapper thinks he know ever'thing — but he don't know gol'-durned nothin'!"

The others hurried into the warm lodge for the night, and in moments I was forced to follow.

THAT WAS ON THE NIGHT of January 13, 1900. As far as I know, I was among the last people on Earth to see a living Martian. In warmer climes, they had all passed away months before, during that hot August. And even as we suffered that night through the grim storm, the huge walking city in Anchorage began a tedious trek north, and was never seen again. Its tracks indicate that it came to the frozen ocean, tried to walk across, and sank into the sea. Many believe that there the Martians drowned, while others wonder if perhaps this had been the Martians' intended destination all along, and so we are forced to wonder if the Martians are even now living in cities under the frozen polar ice, waiting to return.

But on the night I speak of, none of us at Hidden Lodge knew what would happen in months to come. Perhaps because of the Martian's malevolent gaze, perhaps because of the nearness of the creature, or perhaps because of our own feelings of guilt for what we had done, we feared more than ever an ignoble death in the tentacles of the Martians.

After we had warmed ourselves for a few moments in the lodge, the men all scurried away. Doctor Weatherby agreed to accompany me to my cabin under the cover of the storm, so that he might look in on Bessie. More than anything else, it was her need that had driven me to the lodge this night.

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We left Hidden Lodge during the middle of the storm, let the snows cover our trails until we reached the cabin. We found Bessie gone from the cabin. The front door was open, and an armload of wood lay on the floor just inside. I knew then that the Martians had gotten her, had snatched her as she tried to warm herself. I tramped through the snow until I found her frozen, bloodless corpse not far outside the cabin.

I was overcome with grief and insisted on going out, under cover of darkness, and burying her deep in the snow, where the wolves would not find her. I did not care if the Martians took me. Almost, I wanted it.

The storm had passed. The Arctic night was brutally cold, the stars piercingly bright. The aurora borealis flickered green on the northern horizon in a splendid display, and after I buried Bessie, I stood in the snow for a long hour, looking up.

Doctor Weatherby must have worried at why I stayed out for so long, for he came out and put his hands on my shoulders, then stared up into the night sky.

"I say, there it is — isn't it? Mars?" He was staring farther south than I had been watching, apparently believing that I was studying events elsewhere in the heavens. I had never been one to study the skies. I did not know where Mars lay. It stared down at us, like a baleful red eye.

After that, Doctor Willoughby stayed on for a week to care for me. It was an odd time. I was brooding, silent. On the woodpile, the good Doctor set out petri dishes full of agar to the open air. Small colored dots of bacteria were growing in each dish, and by watching these, he hoped to discover precisely what species of bacteria were destroying the Martians. He insisted that cultures of such bacteria might provide an overwhelming defense in future wars. I was intrigued by this, and somehow, of all the things that happened that winter, my numbed mind remembers those green splotches of mold and bacteria better than just about anything else.

After the doctor left, it was the most difficult time of my life. I had no food, no warmth, no comfort during the remainder of that winter. Sometimes I wished the Martians would take me, even as I struggled to stay alive.

Before the end of the cold weather, I was forced to eat my dogs, and ultimately boil the gut strings from my snowshoes to eat there at the last. I struggled from day to day under each successive frozen blast from the north.

I managed to live.

And slowly, haltingly, like the march of an old and enfeebled man, after the lean winter, came a chill spring.

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COMING ATTRACTIONS

MUCH AS WE at *F&SF* love April's harbingers of spring — the budding flowers, the warmer weather, the smell of fresh greenery — we spend the first part of the month dreading tax day, and the second part of the month recovering from it. Since we've noticed a preponderance of people photocopying their returns at ten P.M. on the night of the fifteenth, and racing to the post office to make the midnight deadline (don't ask how we've noticed this — <shudder>), we suspect most of those folks spend April in the same state of mind as we do. We read a lot of fiction in April, probably to escape the realities of death and taxation. And in order to escape reality, the reading needs to be really, really good.

So, with the country's mood in mind, we've packed the April issue with lots of goodies.

Master storyteller **Kate Wilhelm** returns to these pages with a delightful science fiction story about probability, conferences, and coincidences. "Forget Luck" is a story that you will — well — that you will never forget.

Also in April, an old friend reappears. **Lisa Tuttle** published her first short story in *F&SF* in February 1973. In the years since, she has turned her attention to novels. Her short stories are rare gems to be treasured. "Meeting the Muse" is pure fantasy of the Tuttle mold: eerie, moving, and beautiful.

Finally, an experiment: Nebula winner **Alan Brennert** makes his living writing screenplays. He has written several for the new "Outer Limits" television show. His next teleplay, "The Refuge," will air about the time the April issue will appear. *F&SF* will publish the short story version of "The Refuge," a spooky sf tale about a man who has found a refuge in nuclear winter — or has he?

And for those of you who turned to this page in search of the competition, it got eaten by Martians. It will appear in April, along with our usual columnists, and other entertaining reading. And, if you're wondering about future issues, here's a sampling:

Stories by **Ben Bova, Dale Bailey,** and **Robin Wilson;** novelets by **Linda Nagata, Nancy Etchemendy,** and **Sheila Finch;** and novellas by **Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Ian MacLeod,** and **Jerry Oltion.** So, as you're crunching numbers in preparation for the Ides of April, make sure you save enough cash for your *F&SF* subscription. Some things are simply too good to miss.

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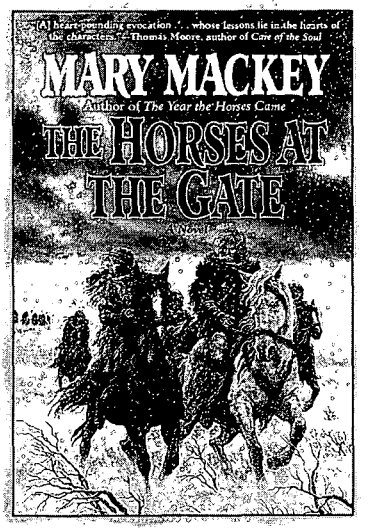
"Mackey joins the company
of Jean Auel and
Elizabeth Marshall Thomas."
—Marge Piercy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